

October  
2017

# ANIMATION MAGAZINE

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years

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VINCENT:**  
UNCOVERING A  
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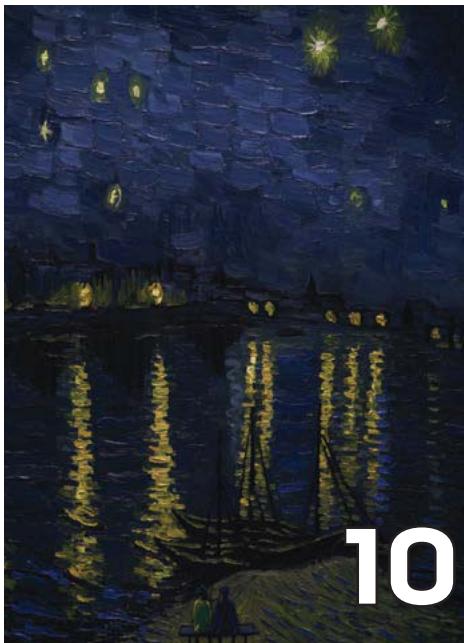
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10

## Frame-By-Frame

**4 Stuff We Love****5 October Planner**

## En Memoriam

**6 Remembering the First Lady of Animation**  
June Foray, 1917-2017

## Features

**10 A Hand-Painted Valentine to Van Gogh**

Billed as the world's first fully oil-painted animated feature film, Dorota Kobiela and Hugh Welchman's *Loving Vincent* is a stunning achievement and a marvel to behold. By Ramin Zahed

## Television

**16 Back in Action**

Disney TV Animation relaunches fan-favorite series *DuckTales*, remixing Carl Barks' iconic adventures with a modern sensibility. By Tom McLean.

**20 Colorful Solutions Offered Here!**

The new Netflix preschool series *True and the Rainbow Kingdom* centers on a smart, problem-solving heroine in an eye-popping digital universe. By Ramin Zahed

**On the Cover:** *DuckTales* launches Sept. 23 on Disney XD.

**Mip Jr Edition:** *The Pirates Next Door* (Cyber Group Studios)

**Ottawa Edition:** *Castlevania*, a Netflix Original Series (Frederator Studios, WOW! Unlimited Media)

**Cartoon Forum Edition:** *Louie and Yoko Build* (Millimages)



16

**22 Playing to Win**

The creator of Cartoon Network's *OK K.O.! Let's Be Heroes* chats about his hot new show and the secrets of his success. By Ramin Zahed

**23 Girl Power Times Four**

The creator of Nelvana's *Mysticons* discusses the inspirations behind the fantasy toon. By Ramin Zahed

**26 Full Circle**

Sprung from the comics biz, *Man of Action* has flourished as animation hit-makers ready to cement their signature creation *Ben 10* as an evergreen franchise. By Tom McLean

**28 Eight Toons to Watch at MIP Junior****32 Everybody Loves Louie!**

Millimages' new animated series *Louie Builds* promises to be one of the hot properties at Cartoon Forum this month.

**33 The Sky's the Limit**

**Cyber Group Studios** fires all cylinders this fall with several new properties at the markets.

## Spotlight

**34 The Toon Pitch Parade of Toulouse**

The projects featured at this year's **Cartoon Forum** offer a dazzling diversity of visuals and subject matter.

**36 Double Exposure**

Two highly original, new films by Japanese auteur **Masaaki Yuasa** will be showcased at this year's Ottawa International Animation Festival.

**38 No Time for Conventional Narratives!**

The 2017 Edition of the **Ottawa International Animation Festival** promises to deliver a fresh slate of inspiring, highly original and irreverent toons. By Ramin Zahed

**39 Viva El Festival!**

The annual Mexican animation event from **Pixelatl** ups the ante with more high-powered stars and inspiring panels and programs.



20

## VFX &amp; Tech

**40 The Art of Curbing CG Noise**

How a UCSB computer science student helped Pixar develop a new noise-eliminating solution. By Ellen Wolff

**42 The State of the Art**

**Faceware Technologies** meets the rising interactive tide with a new SDK for its real-time facial mocap and animation technology, Faceware Live. By Peter Busch

**44 Tech Reviews**

Test driving the **Wacom Cintiq Pro 13, NVIDIA Quadro P4000** and **Radeon Pro WX 3100**. By Todd Sheridan-Perry

## New Media

**46 Seibert Reaches Out to Northern Stars**

Frederator and WOW! expand plans for Canadian content.

## Opportunities

**48 Autonomous Animator: In Praise of Passion and Perseverance**

By Martin Grebing

## Animation Magazine Turns 30

**50 An Explosion of Creativity**

The past decade saw more choices in animated content all over the world as audiences enjoyed 2D, CG, stop-motion and multi-media projects both on the big screen and the small.

## Home Entertainment

**54 Discs to Delight Your Inner Child**

*Captain Underpants, Guardians of the Galaxy, Vol. 2* and *Ushio and Tora* offer shiny new takes on favorite stories, while *The Lion King* gets polished for the Signature Collection. By Mercedes Milligan

## Final Shot

**56 Ten Questions For Niki Lindroth von Bahr**



**W**ho says you can't go home again? Let me begin by saying how thrilled I am to be back at *Animation Magazine* after a long sabbatical! I truly missed writing about all the exciting animated and vfx-related projects that we all love so passionately. Most of all, I missed catching up with you, all the amazingly gifted and brilliant people who work in this one-of-a-kind industry.

This month, my friend and colleague Tom McLean brings you an insightful report on Disney's reboot of *DuckTales*, which showcases great character designs, amazing voice talent and wonderful storylines. It's so

much fun to take in these modern swashbuckling adventures featuring Uncle Donald, Scrooge McDuck and Huey, Dewey and Louie. Something tells us cartoonist Carl Barks would be quite happy with this new reboot.

The innovative animated feature *Loving Vincent* has been high on our must-see list since it made a splash at the Annecy Festival in June. You just have to see what husband-and-wife team Dorota Kobiela and Hugh Welchman and their artists have achieved to believe it. Made for about \$5.5 million, their dazzling movie uses innovative methods to bring the Dutch master's paintings to shimmering life. Our article about the making of the movie sheds light on their fascinating creative process.

Since the fall festival market is in full swing this month, you can find out about the latest editions of Mexico's El Festival, Canada's Ottawa International Animation Festival and France's Cartoon Forum and MIP Junior in this issue of the magazine. You can also read behind-the-scenes articles about hot new small-screen shows such as *True and the Rainbow Kingdom*, *Mysticons*, *OK K.O.! Let's Be Heroes*, *Louie Builds* and much more.

I look forward to hanging out with you at many of our favorite toon festivals and markets around the world. Please say hi and tell me all about your latest projects!

Ramin Zahed  
Editor in Chief  
[ramin@animationmagazine.net](mailto:ramin@animationmagazine.net)

### KEY FRAME

by Bob Harper



Hey guys! Meet Billy, your new showrunner.

Bob Harper is a professional animator who is a creator of a wide variety of content.

He is currently directing an animated series in China.

# ANIMATION MAGAZINE

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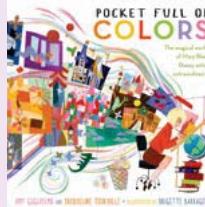
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# Stuff We Love

## ON THE BOOKSHELF

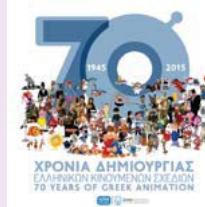
### **Pocket Full of Colors - The Magical World of Mary Blair, Disney Artist Extraordinaire** [Simon & Schuster, \$17.99]

» This month, we are head-over-heels for this young readers' biography of animation trailblazer Mary Blair. Penned by Amy Guglielmo & Jacqueline Tourville, the 48-page book recounts Blair's life journey with a lighthearted, fantastical flair while not shying away from the obstacles she faced as a rare woman (and modern artist!) at Disney. This brief but inspiring account is powerfully punched up by full-page, full-color illustrations by Brigitte Barrager (*Uni the Unicorn*), whose admiration and creative kinship with Blair clearly shine through in each perfectly picked hue and bold brushstroke. A heartwarming wee volume for readers 5, 55 or 105.



### **70 Years of Greek Animation** [ASIFA Hellas, €16/\$19]

» The Hellenic animation scene is on the rise, thanks to enthusiastic support from the national ASIFA chapter and growing international recognition. That's why this bilingual book—200+ pages packed with information, imagery and interviews—is a valuable reference for those of us just catching on. The (at times dizzying) tome covers the local industry from its birth under German occupation through the 70th anniversary in 2015, plus the latest developments in education, new media, and aims for the future. Available at [www.public.gr](http://www.public.gr) or through ASIFA Hellas.



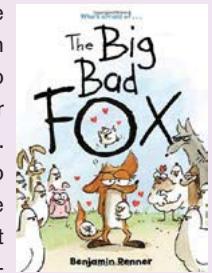
### **El Libro Moushon!** [Moushon!, \$640]

» If you can't make it to Pixelatl or another of the high profile "South of the Border" toon events, Argentine industry watchers *Moushon!* have created a stunningly comprehensive (and extremely colorful) guide to all things *de la animación Latinoamericana*. The regional overview includes spotlights on studios—like Mexopolis, with in-depth interview with Jorge Gutiérrez & Sandra Equihua—events, navigating the industry and more. While it's only available in Spanish, there is an installment payment option, so you can spread your funds between paying for the book and taking language lessons. Available at [moushon.mitiendanube.com](http://moushon.mitiendanube.com)



### **The Big Bad Fox** [First Second, \$15.99]

» GKIDS has just announced that it will be bringing the French animated feature to North America this winter, so it's the perfect time to pick up the graphic novel from Benjamin Renner (*Ernest & Celestine*), who is co-directing the film. The comical tales follow a scheming fox who ends up an unlikely "Mommy" when the chicks he plans to fatten up for a feast imprint on him at hatching. Frankly, the cartoony watercolor illustrations are perfectly charming by themselves! Also available for Kindle from Macmillan.



## GOOD NEWS, EVERYONE!

» With all the kajillion-and-twelve mobile games coming out every month, it's hard to keep up with the dedicated thumb-jockeys in the know. But when **FoxNext Games** and Jam City's **TinyCo** released ***Futurama: Worlds of Tomorrow*** this summer, we knew we had to check it out. Especially since it was created in partnership with series creator Matt Groening and his fellow exec producer David X. Cohen.



Featuring hilarious new space-faring stories from *Futurama* writers as well as fresh animation created by the show's production house Rough Draft Studios, *Worlds of Tomorrow* is a multilayered parfait of gameplay. Build your own New New York, recruit and customize favorite characters (this reviewer audibly squealed unlocking George Takei), and complete space missions with a classic RPG blend of choose-your-own-adventure challenges and turn-based combat. The developers have also stayed true to their promise to grow the game universe with new characters and quests every week.

Your only regret will be having actual responsibilities that tear you away from your Planet Express delivery duties. Available on the App Store and Google Play for free, includes in-app purchases.

## IN THE BAG

» Toon fans who also happen to be fashionistas will love the new **Rugrats X Danielle Nicole** accessories line, available from the designer's e-store and BoxLunch. We're especially smitten with the **Reptar Bar Pouch** (\$42) and dangly **Cynthia Keychain** (\$14). The Nicktoon classic is DN's latest animation collaboration, joining the whimsical and wonderful Disney line launched last year and recent Pokémon collection for ThinkGeek. [[shop.danielle-nicole.com](http://shop.danielle-nicole.com)]



» Need something more practical for back-to-school season? **ThinkGeek** also has a sweet trio of exclusive **Game of Thrones** backpacks from **Crowded Coop**. The steel gray "dragon skin" and carmine red faux leather **Targaryen Bowler Bag** (\$70) makes an especially cool fantasy nerd statement thanks to graphic crest patch and scattered pyramid studs. Is there anything more punk rock than "Fire & Blood?" [[thinkgeek.com](http://thinkgeek.com)] ♦



—Mercedes Milligan

# October Planner

**5** Head to Manhattan's Javits Center for the East Coast's premiere fandom event: **New York Comic Con.** [nycomiccon.com]



**6** The Mane 6 embark on their most magical adventure yet in **My Little Pony: The Movie**. If you're feeling more sci-fi, **Blade Runner 2049** also arrives today.



**10** **Brand Licensing Europe** returns to London's Olympia, connecting leading L&M partners with hot properties. [brandlicensing.eu]



**11** Celebrate the centenary of Argentinian animation at Córdoba's **ANIMA** cultural and academic confab. [animafestival.com.ar]



**13** **Taichung Int'l Animation Festival** in Taiwan offers five days of home-grown shorts and films from around the globe. [twtiaf.com]

**14** Market madness takes over Cannes this week with **MIP Junior** (featuring keynotes from Frederator's Fred Seibert and Netflix kids kaiser Andy Yeatman), followed by **MIPCOM** Oct. 16-19. [mipcomjunior.com | mipcom.com]



**17** The quirky, colorful **KLIK! Amsterdam Animation Festival** marks its 10th edition with the theme "Never Grow Up." [klik.amsterdam]



**18** Check out top properties from SpongeBob to Pleasant Goat at **China Licensing Expo** in Shanghai. [chinalicensingexpo.com]



**20** **Bucheon Int'l Animation Festival** brings five days of features, shorts and more to the bustling South Korean city. [biaf.or.kr]



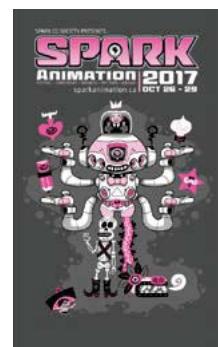
**23** Soak up the wisdom of animation, VFX and game pros like Eric Darnell and Joe Letteri at **VIEW Conference** in Turin, Italy. [viewconference.it]



**25** Explore the growing African animation market at the **DISCOP Johannesburg** content market. [discopafrica.com]



**26** Vancouver, Canada hosts the **SPARK Animation** festival and conference, chaired this year by Jorge Gutiérrez. [sparkfx.ca]



**28** Visual effects players will gather at the Sofitel Beverly Hills for the **VES Summit** today. [visualeffectssociety.com]



**29** **Animag** presents the **World Animation & VFX Summit** in Marina del Rey, CA. Join us for a Halloween weekend of informative sessions, intimate networking and can't-miss parties! [animationmagazine.net/summit] Check FathomEvents.com for the nearest



To get your company's events and products listed in this monthly calendar, please e-mail [mercedes@animationmagazine.net](mailto:mercedes@animationmagazine.net).

# Remembering the First Lady of Animation

## June Foray, 1917-2017

In late July, the animation community was deeply saddened by the passing of iconic voice actress and animation champion June Foray at the age of 99. Foray, who was best known for voicing Rocky the Flying Squirrel and *Looney Tunes'* Granny, was the driving force behind ASIFA and the Annie Awards, as well as the Oscars' animation categories. Foray would have celebrated her 100th birthday on September 18.

ASIFA-Hollywood president Jerry Beck stated: "On behalf of ASIFA-Hollywood, of which June was a founder, we are mourning the passing of animation's best friend. She has touched so many lives: with her voice that of so many classic cartoon character, her efforts to create ASIFA, to maintain the Academy's Oscar for Best Animated Short and her leadership in crafting the category of Best Animated Feature. She was one of a kind. A trailblazer, a great talent and a truly wonderful person. We will never forget her."

Foray's hundreds of acting credits include other popular characters like Natasha Fatale (*The Rocky & Bullwinkle Show*), Magica De Spell and Ma Beagle (*DuckTales*), Jokey Smurf, Witch Hazel (*Looney Tunes*) and Cindy Lou Who (*How the Grinch Stole Christmas*). Continuing to work well into her 90s, the leading lady of animation reprised her classic roles and took on fresh challenges for a range of projects like *The Marvelous Misadventures of Flapjack*, *The Garfield Show* and Disney's *Mulan*. She donned the Rocky mantle once more for Gary Trousdale's *Rocky and Bullwinkle* short in 2014.

Born June Lucille Forer in Springfield, Massachusetts, Foray started working in local radio dramas as a child, and continued in radio after graduating high school when her family relocated to Los Angeles—in addition to frequent appearances on popular shows,

she had her own, *Lady Make Believe*. Foray also worked at Capitol Records making children's albums and comedy records.

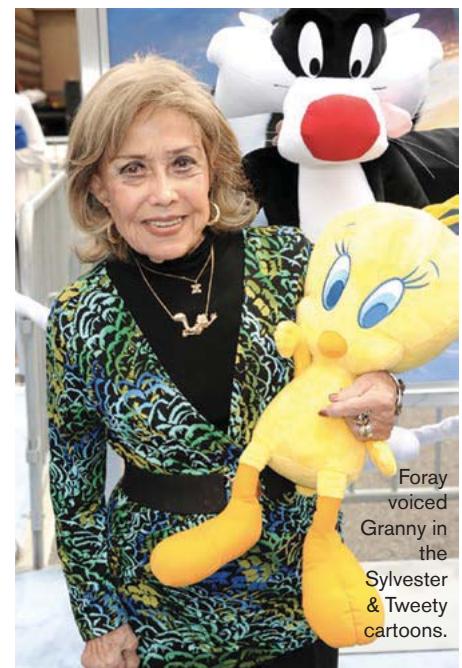
Foray's long career in animation began when the Walt Disney studio approached her to play Lucifer the cat in *Cinderella*, which led to a series of gigs with the studio—mostly uncredited. She had a starring role in the 1952 Donald Duck short *Trick or Treat* as Hazel the Witch, a name and occupation combination that would prove quite popular in her character roster. Through the 1950s, Foray also worked with animation icons Tex Avery, Walter Lantz and Chuck Jones. It was Jones who once said of the legendary actress, "June Foray is not the female Mel Blanc, Mel Blanc was the male June Foray."

Her best known work was in Jay Ward's *The Rocky and Bullwinkle Show*, which ran from 1959 to 1964, playing Rocket J. Squirrel and villainous Russian minx Natasha Fatale. Foray also worked on other Ward toons, playing Nell in *Dudley Do-Right*, Jane in *George of the Jungle* and Marigold in *Tom Slick*.

In addition to her career as a performer, Foray played a key role in the animation industry as one of the original members of ASIFA-Hollywood, founding the Annie Awards, and lobbying for 20



One of Foray's best-known roles was Jay Ward's Rocky the Flying Squirrel.



Foray voiced Granny in the Sylvester & Tweety cartoons.



Foray played Jokey Smurf in the 1980s TV series.



Foray received the prestigious Governor's Award from the Television Academy in 2013.



were the Grammys, the Tonys, the Oscars, but nobody recognizes animation," she said in an interview with *Variety*. The first event gathered some 400 attendees to honor Max and Dave Fleischer. At the 1995 Annie Awards, she was presented with the first June Foray Award, which was established to recognize "a significant and benevolent or charitable impact on the art and industry of animation."

Foray received a Daytime Emmy in 2012 for playing Mrs. Cauldron on *The Garfield Show*, and was honored with a Governor's Award in 2013. Her many achievements have also been marked with a Walk of Fame star and a Hall of Fame Award from the World Animation & VFX Summit. A documentary about her life and career, *The One and Only June Foray*, was released in 2013.

As *L.A. Times* critic Robert Lloyd pointed out in his appreciation of Foray, "There is a quality of youthfulness even in older characters, like Granny or Witch Hazel, a playfulness that cuts through the phlegm. She had range, literally, going low for Natasha, the semi-seductive Pottsylvania spy, and high for Rocky, boy squirrel and skeptical hero. Witch Hazel, she said, she made 'not evil at all.' Working into her 90s—she was awarded her first Emmy at 94, for *The Garfield Show*—she never sounded her age. The clock might have argued otherwise, but it was an argument Foray won, until the clock ran out.

Thank you, June, for all the joy you brought into this world!" ♦



Foray played demonic doll Talky Tina in the 1963 *Twilight Zone* episode.

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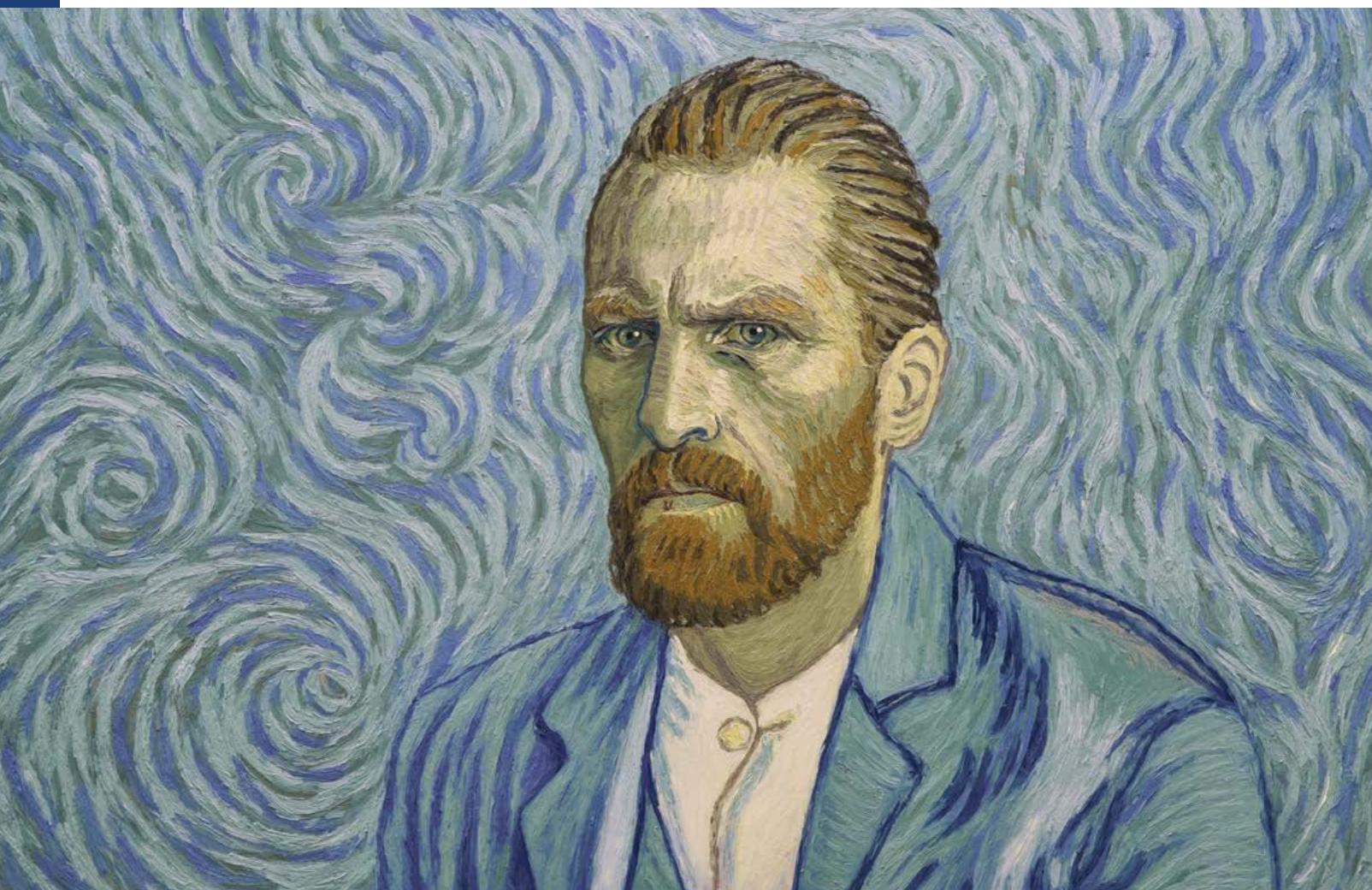
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# A Hand-Painted Valentine to Van Gogh

Billed as the world's first fully oil-painted animated feature film, Dorota Kobiela and Hugh Welchman's *Loving Vincent* is a stunning achievement and a marvel to behold.

By Ramin Zahed

“We cannot speak other than by our paintings,” wrote the beloved Dutch artist Vincent Van Gogh in his final letter before his death. Husband-and-wife team Dorota Kobiela and Hugh Welchman have taken the painter’s words to heart and created a stunning movie that brings his paintings to life, with the aid of 125 painters from all over the world.

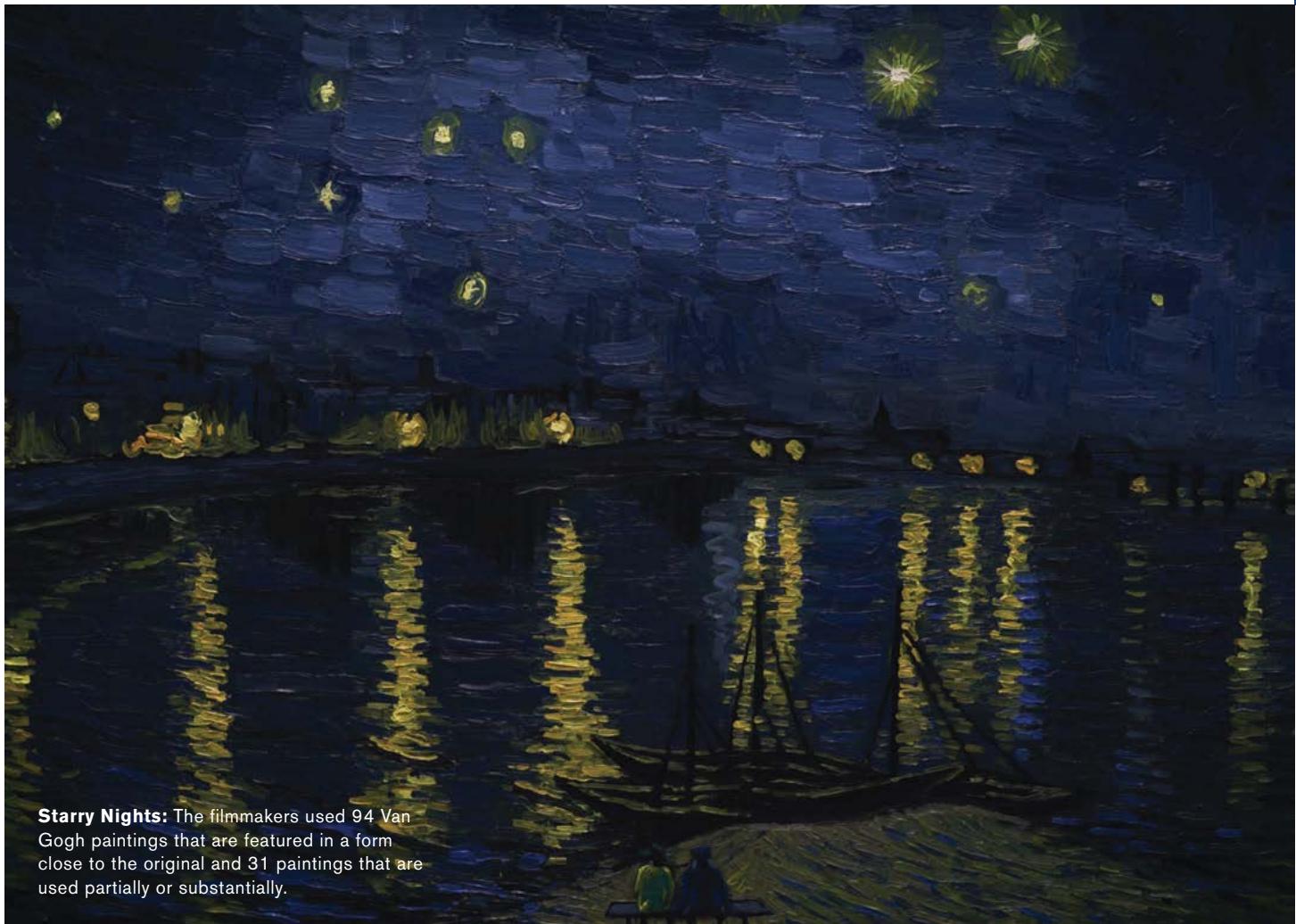
The journey of this acclaimed feature film, *Loving Vincent*, which won the top prize at Annecy this year and will be released by Good Deed Ent. in the U.S. in September, began almost 10 years ago when Kobiela (*Little Postman*, *The Flying Machine*) set out to make an animated short about Van Gogh. As co-director Welchman explains during a recent phone interview, she had studied fine art and was al-

ways intrigued by the life and work of the Dutch painter. “She had been re-reading his letters and wanted to paint a seven-minute short based on his life herself,” recalls Welchman. “When I moved in with her, I started to read about him as well and was able to persuade Dorota to do a feature-length movie instead of a short.”

“I was 30 when I first came up with the idea

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**Starry Nights:** The filmmakers used 94 Van Gogh paintings that are featured in a form close to the original and 31 paintings that are used partially or substantially.

'I have battled with depression all my life, and I was inspired with how strong [Van Gogh] was in picking himself up from similarly terrible life setbacks as a young man, and finding through art, a way to bring beauty to the world.'

— Co-writer, co-director & producer Dorota Kobiela



to do this project, around the same age Vincent was when he started to paint," notes Kobiela. "More than his paintings, which I do love, it was the example of how Vincent lived that inspired me. I have battled with depression all my life, and I was inspired by how strong he was in picking himself up from similarly terrible life setbacks as a young man, and finding through art, a way to bring beauty to the world."

Welchman, who is based in Poland and has produced several well-received animated proj-

ects such as the Oscar-winning short *Peter & the Wolf* (2006) and *The Flying Machine* (2011), says he became absolutely obsessed with Van Gogh's enigmatic life and phenomenal achievements. "He had failed at four careers by the time he was 28," he elaborates. "He was written off by his family as a no-hoper. But then he became a self-taught artist without any real artistic background and was able to create a body of work that mesmerized the world in only 10 years."

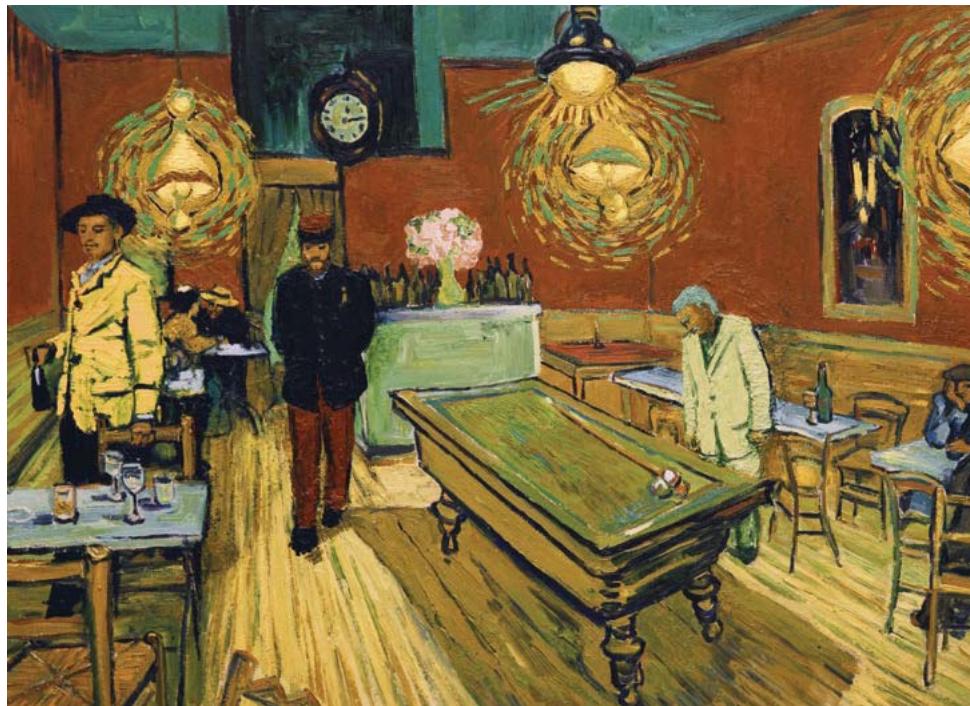
Soon, Welchman convinced Kobiela that it would be impossible for her to work on such an ambitious project alone. "We did a quick calculation, and it would take her 81 years to paint the film," says the film's writer-director. "So, we decided to invite painters from around the world to audition for the film. We had over 5,000 applications, and out of that we held auditions. The ones who passed the tests were put in an intensive, 180-hour animation course, and then, we had 125 people who joined our production as painters."

### Art Isn't Easy

Of course, the directors had their share of concerns about their gigantic undertaking. "I was worried about hiring these painters who had not worked on an animated project before," Welchman notes. "It's hard to stop animators from fighting each other, let alone these artists who were used to painting on their own. And they had to learn to paint in this specific style. We thought that was going to be problematic. But the funny thing is that that wasn't the toughest challenge. I thought painting 65,000 oil frames on 103 cm by 60 cm



**Grounded in Reality:** All the characters featured in the movie are played by actors who worked either on sets specially constructed to look like Van Gogh paintings or against green-screens, with the paintings being composited in, along with CG animation after the shoot. The live-action shoot took place at Three Mills Studios in London and CeTA Film Studio in Wroclaw.



(about 3.4 feet by 2 feet) canvases was going to be difficult, but persuading people to give us the money we needed was tougher. Fortunately, we were able to raise the \$5.5 million needed for the project—which is probably just the cost of the title sequence for a *Star Wars* movie... We were, without a doubt, coming up with the slowest method of making a feature film ever devised."

Kobiela started the first draft of the feature film in 2011, and Welchman joined the project a year later. After making the concept trailer, they tried various animation techniques to evoke the fluid, familiar style perfected by the Dutch master. "We practiced with glass ani-

mation, then tried a mixture of computer animation and painted animation. We were constantly writing and testing the animation to bring Van Gogh's paintings to life in the most vivid way possible."

### Imitations of Life

With the help of head of painting Piotr Dominiak, vfx supervisor Lukasz Mackiewicz and head of production Tomek Wochniak, the team came up with the plan to shoot the project first as a live-action film in London. Using actors such as Douglas Booth (playing Armand Roulin), Eleanor Tomlinson (Adeline Ravoux), Jerome Flynn (Dr. Gachet), Saoirse Ronan (Mar-

guerite Gachet), Chris O'Dowd (Postman Joseph Roulin) and Aidan Turner (The Boatman), the directors re-enacted the painter's final weeks to offer clues about the mystery of his death.

"We were lucky because Dorota had a wide range of experiences in visual effects, design, editing and animation," says Welchman. "She knows all the different computer programs. I had a lot of experience in stop-motion projects, so together we came up with a combination of the way we produced stop-motion film, traditional animation and visual effects."

Welchman and his team began the process by creating a simple animatic and previs for each of the sequences. "We had to spend a year re-imagining the paintings to bring them to life," says the director. "The live-action scenes were done with green-screen about 80 percent of the time, and on set about 20 percent. The previs helped us a lot because Van Gogh's paintings don't usually jive with physical reality. You can't build them, and they defy the laws of physics. That's why we had to map everything out and define the environments with computers, just like we were directing a vfx-heavy film. Then, we composited with 2D and CG animation. After all of that, our team of 125 artists started to hand paint the footage frame by frame."

The team used Maya for the 3D animation, After Effects and Photoshop, as well as Nuke for the on-set composite work. They also incorporated Dragonframe software for the animation. The production team was able to use high-quality digital copies of the art with the cooperation of the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam. "We wanted to use their expertise not only with the script, but the painting technique as well," explains Welchman. "They get a thousand requests a day, so it took us about a year to hear back, but we were able to gain their trust and they gave us access to the experts and to the paintings. The Dutch premiere will be held at the museum on October 5."

### A Man of Mystery

Many have wondered why Kobiela and Welchman took an unconventional approach to the painter's life, framing the story as a quasi-mystery—an investigation into the reasons behind his death. "We did nine versions of the script," says Welchman. "Dorota's first script for the short was a very sensual film. We always had these questions about his final weeks, what was he feeling during this time. Our big question was, why? He had been much more depressed in his life before. There were many reasons that he was having a more

positive time. He had just sold his first painting for a proper sum of money and he had got great reviews. Other painters were tipping him to be the next big star. In addition, his brother Theo had just named his son after Vincent."

Around the same time, a biography of the painter by Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith put forward the theory that perhaps Van Gogh didn't commit suicide and he was accidentally shot by some teenage boys. "Dorota and I thought that by looking at different and conflicting theories on his death we could understand more about his life. There's drama that comes out of that conflict," says Welchman. "We also watch a lot of film noir, so the approach was natural for us."

So how do they see the death of their enigmatic subject? "We have different opinions," says the director. "Dorota thinks he killed himself because of his brother, because he felt he had been a burden to him for too long. I am more open to the theory that he might have been accidentally shot. We have been arguing about who's right for a few years now!"

As the film's producers await *Loving Vincent*'s release worldwide this fall, they are pleased that their labor of love will spark more interest in the life and art of the tortured artist. Welchman also hopes that their incredible technique will be embraced by more directors. "I am in love with our method of filmmaking," he exclaims. "I hope other people will want to direct in this style. It's a shame to spend so much brain and heart power to set up this style and not have others follow it as well."

He also points out that Van Gogh's life continues to be a source of inspiration for him and his wife. "During the production, there were times when we worked 14 hours a day, seven days a week, and I felt quite miserable," he recalls. "But then, I'd tell myself, 'Come on, Hugh, pull yourself together!' Look at what Vincent did. He worked so hard and had so many things against him. There's a reason he is seen as one of the greatest artists of all time. He had this amazing, intense passion for life."

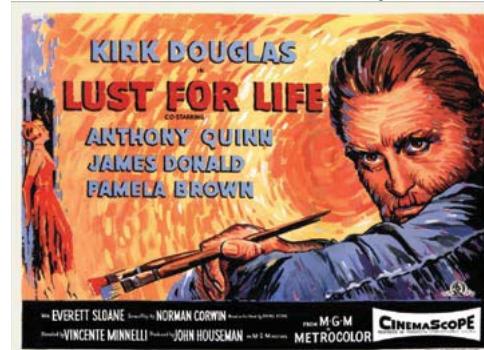
Kobiela agrees, "We only decided to take the risk of making the world's first fully painted feature film because of how much people around the world are already loving Vincent. I hope this film will inspire audiences to find out more about Vincent, read his letters, and see his paintings in the flesh. I want everyone to be *Loving Vincent*." ♦

**Good Deed Entertainment will release *Loving Vincent* in the U.S. on September 22. The film begins its European run in October.**

## Catching Up with Vincent

If you'd like to get ready for the beautifully animated version of the Dutch master's life, there are several movies we recommend for you to screen:

- **Lust for Life** (1956). Kirk Douglas stars as the artist in this classic Hollywood adaptation of the artist's life, produced by John Houseman, directed by Vincente Minnelli, and co-starring Oscar-winner Anthony Quinn as his friend Paul Gauguin.
- **Vincent & Theo** (1990). Tim Roth plays Van Gogh in this well-received Robert Altman-directed biopic, which does a beautiful job of fleshing out his relationship with his brother Theo, portrayed by Paul Rhys.
- **Dreams** (1990). Akira Kurosawa's stunning anthology features a section titled Crows in which the beloved artist is played by none other than Martin Scorsese.
- **Van Gogh** (1991). French director Maurice Pialat brings the final 67 days of the artist's life to dramatic life, starring Jacques Dutronc.
- **Van Gogh: Painted With Words** (2010). Benedict Cumberbatch stars as Vincent in Andrew Hutton's BBC TV movie, which uses dialogue based on the artist's own words.



I thought painting 65,000 oil frames on 103 cm by 60 cm (about 3.4 feet by 2 feet) canvases was going to be difficult, but persuading people to give us the money we needed was tougher!



— Co-writer, co-director & producer Hugh Welchman



# A Race to the Finnish Line

Top-notch animated content from Finland is ready to the industry at Cartoon Forum 2017.

**Finnanimation** presents five exciting new projects at this year's Cartoon Forum. These innovative animated projects center on outsiders finding their way in new worlds, solving everyday problems in extraordinary worlds and having absurd adventures along the way. This year's crop of excellent Finnish series are an excellent reminder that animation breeds imagination.

## A quest to determine the best thing ever!

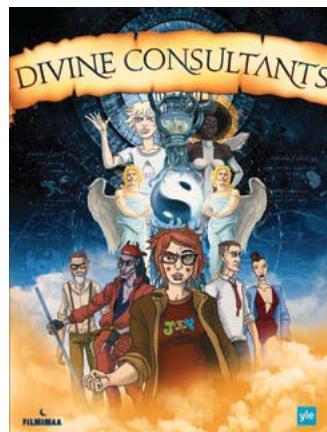
Kids love to compare things, whether it's ice-cream flavors, whose dad is strongest or imaginary monsters. **Gigglebug Entertainment** is developing an original comedy TV-series that celebrates different tastes in the most absurd way.



Two comically headstrong and wildly imaginative best friends spend their time comparing what is the best thing of all time. If you thought comparing apples and oranges was impossible, wait until **Best & Bester** compare flying cows to double sided pizza, and toenail clippings to toilets. Because for Best & Bester, no comparison is too silly when you're trying to determine what the best thing that has ever existed is, and no argument is too illogical if it means that you're right!

## Targeting 14- to 25-year-olds

**Divine Consultants** is an animated adventure comedy with great cross-platform potential. In the beginning of this unique story our young heroes fall to their deaths but find themselves in a corrupt Afterlife where they battle against a corporate God and other

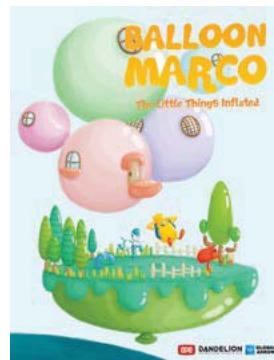


forces of good and evil in the pursuit of truth. Who is behind this macabre fantasy world and who gets to decide what goes on in Heaven or

in Hell? Can Joye save all the human souls? *Divine Consultants* is created by **Juha Fiilin** and is at an advanced editorial development stage.

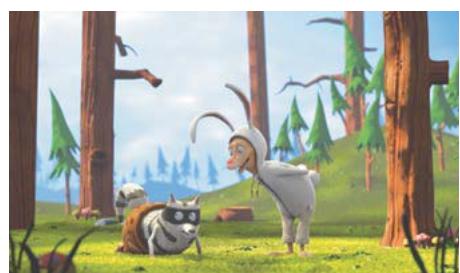
## Anima co-produces with Global Arrow (JP)

A bright yellow balloon named Marco lives in Balloon Town where all the balloons live after they are released to the sky. He likes to listen to stories that his Great Grandpa tells him of balloon knights, astronauts, and adventurers. Inspired by these balloon heroes, Marco goes into Balloon Town with loyal side-kick, Bumper, to solve everyday problems in ways only an inflated balloon can! With Marco's creative ideas, and Bumper's ability to transform into anything, balloons of all shape, size, and color get a little help from Marco and live happily in Balloon Town.



## Forest fables

**Hare and the Prisoner** tells the story of a raccoon who was born with a birthmark



across her eyes. Others have always treated her like a thief because of it. But when she arrives in his forest, Hare sees only a new friend. After all, adventures are much more fun as two.

Hare can't wait to introduce Prisoner to chattering birds, curious squirrels and grumpy predators. In turn Prisoner shows Hare that there is a huge world beyond the trees. **Ink and Light**'s new series reflects the experiences of their young audience as Hare and Prisoner navigate new friendships and discover that everybody has something unique to offer.

## Meet the Royals next door!

**Royale Sisters** is a comedy about a royal family that lives in a regular house! Due to extensive refurbishment of their castle, they were forced to move out.



Stella, her sister Molly, her parents and pets discover everyday stuff with enthusiasm and a touch of eccentricity, while they try to stay true to their tradition and royal duties. For Stella it is all about blending in at the new school, making friends and having people like her for herself, not because of her noble ancestry.

This new **Pikkukala** series explores the challenge of adapting to change without losing one's identity in a key of humor. ♦

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# Back in Action

**Disney TV Animation relaunches fan-favorite series *DuckTales*, remixing Carl Barks' iconic adventures with a modern sensibility.** By Tom McLean.

One of the most overlooked treasures in the long history of Disney is the *Donald Duck* comic-book series from Carl Barks. Revered for decades by comics fans who knew Barks – long unable to sign his own name to Disney work – only as “the good duck artist,” his decades-long run is a veritable gold mine of adventure.

Barks’ work inspired the original *DuckTales* cartoon, a major hit produced by the then-nascent Disney Television Animation from 1987-1990. That series, from its infinitely catchy theme song to successful spin-offs, brought Barks-style adventure to a generation that still reveres and loves the series. That, of course, made it primo material for a reboot.

As in the original, the new *DuckTales* follows Scrooge McDuck, the world’s richest duck and its greatest adventurer, and the escapades he and his great-nephews (triplets

Huey, Louie and Dewey) get into – usually, defending Uncle Scrooge’s riches from rivals, pursuing lost treasures, solving mysteries and re-writing history from time to time. Joining them are the usual suspects: overprotective Donald Duck, the triplets’ uncle; Uncle Scrooge’s housekeeper Mrs. Beakley and her granddaughter Webby; and blowhard pilot Launchpad McQuack.

Viewers got their first taste of the series Aug. 12, with an hour-long premiere event



**A Mix of Old & New:**  
*DuckTales* brings back familiar characters from the comics and Emmy-winning TV series, as well as new ones.

on Disney XD, with the regular series celebrating Sept. 23 the 30th anniversary of the original’s debut with two new episodes airing six times that day.

Executive producer Matt Youngberg (*Ben 10: Omniverse*, *Transformers: Animated*) and co-producer/story editor Francisco Angones (*Wander Over Yonder*) confess – as does most of the crew – to being among the many die-

hard fans of the original show. They love the original, and the Barks source material, and feel no small amount of pressure to make a show that lives up to expectations.

“We were all massive *DuckTales* and Barks fans – I mean the lyrics to the theme song were in my wedding vows,” says Youngberg. “We just have to incorporate it all and take the elements that work together and fit them into a thing that’s still new, that gives kids today the same feeling that we had when we heard the



word *DuckTales*."

The two key elements to that are the conceit that Uncle Scrooge was once the world's greatest adventurer, and that the cast of ducks form a modern blended family. "You can track everything off of those two things," says Youngberg.

The adventure part of it draws heavily on Barks' tales. "We started with Barks, who was the first person to remix these characters," says Youngberg. "They existed as corporate mascots and funny cartoon characters, and Barks did Donald Duck finds pirate treasure."

## One Big Family

Anchoring this is the family dynamic, says Youngberg, himself the product of a large brood. "Every family that I know has in-jokes and secrets and alliances and rivalries," he says.

With so large a cast, Angones says they put together a "murder board" and used it to figure out how each character was different and how each would interact and conflict with any combination of others. (In a nod to this, Webby unveils her own "murder board" of Scrooge McDuck's family tree and history in the movie debut.)

"Figuring out those conflicts helped bring the comedy to the show, because when you

put Launchpad and Dewey together, that relationship and the fun you can have between them is going to be different than when you put Launchpad and Webby together," says Youngberg.

The bonus is that these themes work together on multiple levels for fans. Barks' comics ran from the 1940s through the 1970s, and

look of the show, for which technology offers options far beyond what either Barks or the original animated series could have imagined. Art director Sean Jimenez (*Gravity Falls*) says he wanted his designs to evoke the feel of reading Barks' now-vintage comic books but also be functional for the crew working on a tight schedule to animate the first season's 26 episodes of 22 minutes.

A high-resolution photo of a pulpy chunk of newsprint became the key to Jimenez's look, which uses the texture along with offset printing and flat colors and subtle use of halftone dots on backgrounds inked like a comic book to create the show's look.

"It was a great aesthetic to do that, and to me there's something beautiful about that whole offset idea," says Jimenez. "Usually the knee-jerk reaction on any cartoon is to be very precise because you want the audience to see how good you are. But that's not our style!"

Youngberg adds that the pulpy look and imperfections make the setting more realistic because they are not precise but they are specific. "It's hard to come up with specificity and it's hard to avoid cliche," he says. "You hope the audience picks up on that and it makes it feel like a real place."

**'We didn't want to treat the nephews as the same character, which is something that is usually done with them...We wanted to make sure we could find a way to distinguish their personalities clearly.'**

— Exec producer Matthew Youngberg

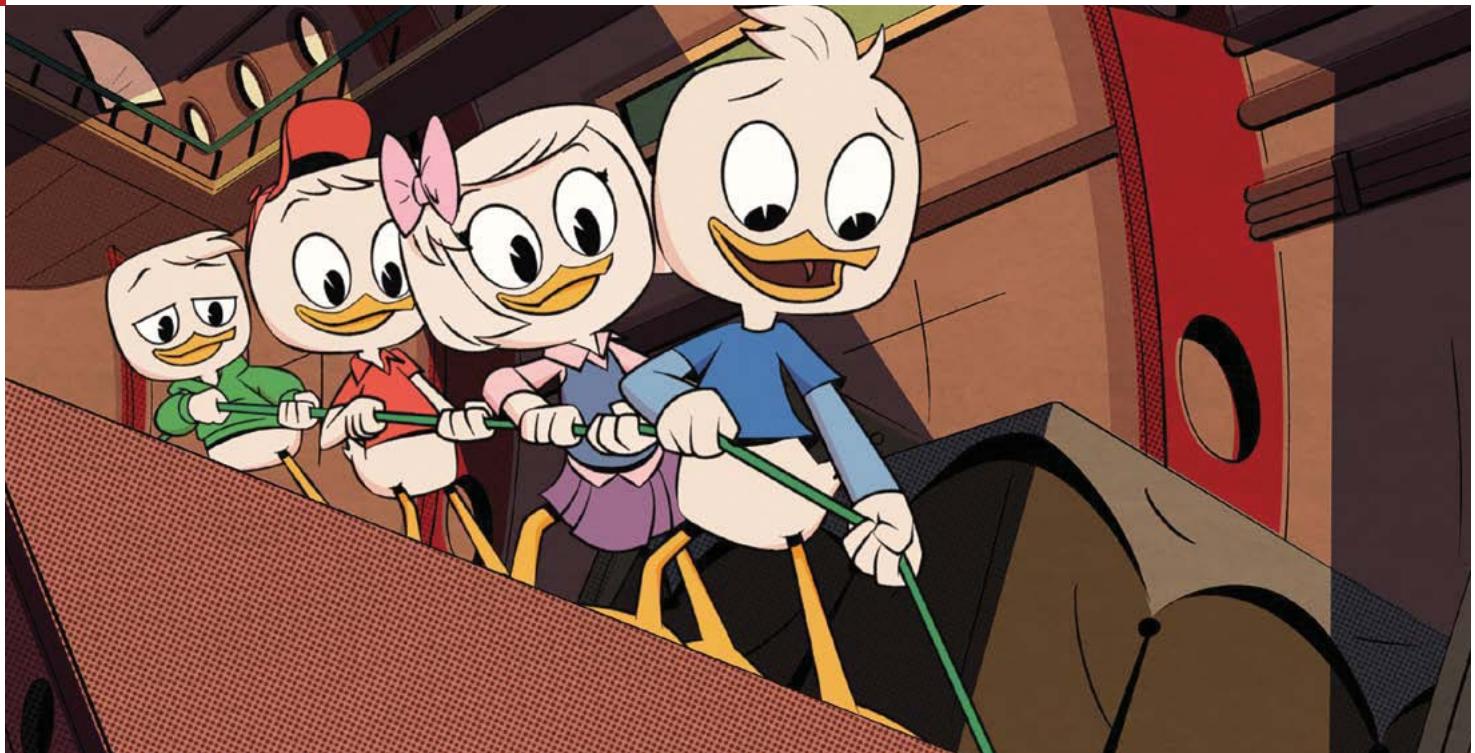
the original animated series has been largely dormant since production ended in 1990, giving subtext to Uncle Scrooge's return to adventuring and his reunion with Donald, the boys, Launchpad and Webby.

"You'll see in the first season a lot of the stories pertain to who is your family, what is your lineage," says Youngberg. "You're discovering things about yourself and your family that you've never known before."

## Pulp Nonfiction

Those meta-textual elements extend to the





## Voices in the Mix

Bringing the characters to life is a voice cast headlined by former *Doctor Who* star David Tennant as Scrooge McDuck. The cast also features Bobby Moynihan as Louie, Ben Schwartz as Dewey and Danny Pudi as Huey. Tony Anselmo plays Donald Duck, Toks Olagundoye as Mrs. Beakley and Kate

Micucci as Webby. Recurring guest voices include Lin-Manuel Miranda, Allison Janney, Margo Martindale, Paul F. Tompkins, Kimiko Glenn, Jim Rash, Josh Brener, Keith Ferguson, Eric Bauza and Corey Burton.

Casting the triplets and making sure each has a distinctive voice – and that Webby was included on par with the boys – was the most important part of the process. “The show lives and dies on whether you believe this family is a family, and whether their interchange is believable and relatable in some fun way,” says Angones.

“We didn’t want to treat the nephews as the same character, which is something that is usually done with them,” adds Youngberg. “We wanted to make sure we could find a way to distinguish their personalities clearly.”

Going through literally hundreds of combinations for the young characters, Youngberg

The creative team took a story approach driven by character relationships, such as between Webby and the nephews, seen above and in this storyboard panel.



says they kept coming back to the actors who made the final cut, all of whom have improv experience that gives them a realistic banter.

“Once we found the actors who embodied the characters, we actually went back and rewrote the first few scripts to get it even more in their voice,” says Angones.

Toon City Animation and Snipple Animation Studios, both in Manila, the Philippines, are animating the show. Youngberg says many Disney-trained artists work at those shops and “bring a classic sensibility to the show.” All the front-end work – writing, storyboard, recording – is done at Disney Television Animation in Glendale, Calif., as is final editing, sound and music.

While fans have to wait until Sept. 23 for the series itself to kick off, the movie event has earned strong reviews from fans thrilled

with the new mix of an old favorite. And that leaves the crew of the new show lots of opportunity to do what Barks’ comics and the original series did best.

“It wouldn’t be *DuckTales* if we didn’t solve mysteries and rewrite history,” says Youngberg. ♦



Francisco Angones



Sean Jimenez

**DuckTales begins its run on Disney XD on September 23 at 7 a.m., 11 a.m., 2 p.m., 5, p.m., 8 p.m. and 10:30 p.m. The episodes will be available on the Disney XD app and Disney XD VOD on the same day. The series premiere coincides with the 30th anniversary of the original series.**

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# Colorful Solutions Offered Here!

The new Netflix preschool series *True and the Rainbow Kingdom* centers on a smart, problem-solving heroine in an eye-popping digital universe. By Ramin Zahed

If you know a preschooler who has been bingeing on Netflix and obsessed with a charming eight-year-old girl named True, her feline pal Bartleby and a magical Wishing Tree, you are not alone. Lots of young viewers have fallen under the spell of *True and the Rainbow Kingdom*, a colorful new CG-animated series exec produced by Guru Studios, in collaboration with Pharrell Williams (Yes, that Pharrell Williams!), the artists collective known as FriendsWithYou and Home Plate Entertainment.

The 20 x 22-minute series, which debuted on Netflix in August, follows the adventures of its smart heroine as she sets out to solve problems in the magical Rainbow Kingdom, teaching kids about empathy and compassion without being preachy and pedantic. The journey of True to the small screen began more than seven years ago when creators Samuel Borkson and Arturo Sandoval (FriendsWithYou) met with exec producer Bill Schultz.

"When I met with Sam and Arturo in 2010, I was blown away by their creativity and artful integrity," recalls Schultz, an Emmy-winning producer whose many credits include *The Simpsons*, *King of the Hill*, *Ed, Edd n' Eddy* and *Wild Grinders*. "We fell in love with the idea

of True as a heroine, and saw her as this non-gender-biased character. The research also showed us that the audience is gender-neutral if you tell a good story to young viewers."

After Schultz meet with Mary Bradin and Frank Falcone of Canada's bustling Guru Studio (*Justin Time*, *PAW Patrol*) at an industry event, the three joined forces to put *True* on the fast track. "I had known and admired Frank and Mary for many years, and we were always on the lookout for a project to collaborate on. Frank was familiar with the artists, and Mary had actually visited one of FriendsWithYou's art installations in Toronto's Queen's Park, so I didn't have to sell it to them. It was really a marriage made in animation heaven."

## Pokémon for Girls?

"When Bill showed us the material, I said this is Pokémon with a bit of a girl focus and no fighting," notes Falcone. "I loved the idea of all the power-ups that can help you solve a problem. The characters reflect the goodwill and empathy that is behind the creators' mission. What it really needed was having a lead character that can drive a story and developing the rest of the characters to a place where we knew who they were."

Bradin brings up the fact that centering the show on a strong, smart young girl is what really makes this show a special project. "Many preschool shows have a girl lead, but then, they are all about magic or being a princess," she explains. "True is a girl who uses her critical thinking and really has to solve a problem using the Wish power that she has been given on each adventure. She's kind of a Junior Wonder Woman! Also, creating a show that focuses on kindness and mindfulness, but not in a preachy, pedantic way, has been incredibly fun. These are values that are much needed in the world today!"

Both Schultz's company Home Plate Entertainment and Guru were very hands-on from the early stages of development to sales, financing and distribution because it was such a unique opportunity for everyone involved. In addition, things really started jumping when musician Pharrell Williams, who is also a big fan of the artists, decided to come on board as exec producer. "I know people says this about every project, but for us, this was the right set of people at the right time with the right vision."

## Netflix Ups the Ante

When Netflix expressed interest and greenlit



**A Friend in Deed:** The series centers on a smart, resourceful character who is quick to offer her help when those around her face problems.



Exec producer Pharrell Williams, a big fan of the artists collective FriendsWithYou, was a firm believer in the project from the start.



Bill Schultz



Frank Falcone



Mary Bradin

the show for 20 episodes, the team entered a fast and furious R&D process. Netflix also allowed the creators to opt for a 22-minute-long format rather than the usual 11-minute length used for preschool shows. As Bradin explains, "What we often see in preschool shows is that everything gets crammed in 11-minute segments, and this was a wonderful opportunity for us to create 22-minute stories and use a different storytelling approach than preschoolers are accustomed to."

Schultz agrees. "The trend these days is to cater to shorter attention spans, but thanks to Netflix's unique position, we were allowed to develop the characters, have comedy and gag-driven and non-dialogue-driven moments and focus on the narrative in three acts. This is more of a lean-forward experience rather than the old days, where kid would watch TV while eating their cereals."

### Visuals That Pop

The design aesthetic of *True and the Rainbow Kingdom* is another huge draw. "The show is clearly aligned with the design aesthetic of *FriendsWithYou*," notes Falcone. "Kids are so used to seeing rich visuals as the lines are

clearly blurring between what we see on the big screen and their personal devices. Their expectations are raised. What we really focused on is interesting materials and quality of environments to allow simple shapes and designs to live in this digital world, without being dishonest to the medium. Our goals were to imagine a world that was a cross between a Rankin/Bass stop-motion special and Super Mario."

To create this digital world, Guru relied on Redshift Rendering, a powerful GPU-accelerated renderer, which is built to address the demands of today's high-end production rendering. "We got a lot of speed and efficiency out of Redshift, allowing us to provide quick feedback to the artists so they could really hone the look of it, and really do something that you can't really do in traditional rendering pipelines. We really wanted to ensure that the characters and stories are real and look beautiful at the end of the day. Kids can tell the difference between a show that is just slapped together and one that is given lots of love and attention."

Now that the first season of the series is finding its audience on Netflix, the creators are proud of the highly original, unique universe they have created together. "We're proud to

be behind this creative-driven show which doesn't have a cookie-cutter look. When we tested the show, it was thrilling to see that the kids were all solidly engaged," says Schultz. "We also got a huge engagement from boys, as boys watching shows today don't look at having a female lead as an issue. They just like to watch a show that is fun."

After working on so many different animated properties, Schultz says he always begins a project hoping it will be unique and trailblazing. "At times, we've had to fight the urge to take shortcuts, but we didn't, and worked on this show for seven years," says the toon veteran. "We kept our heads down, and everyone shared the same vision to create something worthwhile for the audience, and I think we have achieved it. We were quite ambitious and hopefully, you can see it all on the screen."

Bradin says she is also proud of *True's* wonderful animated adventures. "I strongly believe that children deserve amazing, top-quality shows, not just leftovers. As grown-ups, we are now demanding that quality, and children should have the same options, and I believe we have delivered!"

"We have created an amazing playground of characters for preschoolers," concludes Falcone. "This universe is going to be an incredible place for us to tell playful stories and discover ways to engage with that universe, which will be a lot of fun for the audience to explore, hopefully beyond the 20 episodes as well."

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**All 20 episodes of *True and the Rainbow Kingdom* are available for streaming on Netflix.**

# Playing to Win

The creator of Cartoon Network's *OK K.O.! Let's Be Heroes* chats about his hot new show and the secrets of his success.

By Ramin Zahed

**W**hen Ian Jones-Quartey was only 15, he put together his own home computer from what spare parts he could find. Then, he saved money to buy a scanner, uploaded his drawings and created his own webcomic. Years later, after graduating from New York's School of Visual Arts, he cold-called every animation studio in the city until he landed his first job at a commercial studio. It's that kind of creativity, persistence and enthusiasm that has helped the toon veteran work on shows such as *The Venture Bros.*, *Adventure Time* and *Bravest Warriors*, and become the supervising director and co-developer of *Steven Universe*. His much-anticipated new show *OK K.O.! Let's Be Heroes* has already attracted a die-hard following since its premiere in August on Cartoon Network.

The series started its life as a Cartoon Network pilot short called *Lakewood Plaza Turbo*, which was then retooled as a mobile game on CN's Anything app last year. Jones-Quartey even participated in a "game jam" session in Portland, Oregon, where participants created a variety of different games based on the property.

"I first pitched the show six years ago when I was a storyboard supervisor on *Adventure Time*," Jones-Quartey says during a recent phone interview. "I really wanted to make a show that was super fun and had everything that I loved when I was a kid. So, it became a cartoon about young friends who get to fight robots."

Billed as the nexus of gaming and animation, the show was developed to play on all screens while offering a solid storytelling experience for viewers. Each episode follows K.O. (voiced by

Courtenay Taylor), a bright and optimistic kid who tries to be the greatest hero he can be in the videogame-inspired world of Lakewood Plaza. The voice cast also includes Jones-Quartey himself, Kate Flannery (*The Office*), Ashly Burch (*Adventure Time*) and David Herman (*MADtv*).

"One of the greatest things about our show is that it had a chance to get its own footing through several different media," says Jones-Quartey, who is also the creator of the award-winning webcomic *RPG World*. "When I made the pilot in 2013, it had a more global perspective. As more people started to work on the show, it became more about the characters in this world."

enjoy this show, because I wrote it for myself."

The 30-person pre-production team based at Cartoon Network's studios in Burbank are ruled by storyboards. "Storyboarders have total control over the art style in the episodes," says Jones-Quartey. "They also get to write most of the dialogue. Every episode has its own individual look, which is something I learned from working on *Steven Universe* and *Adventure Time*. It keeps the shows alive. I'm not a fan of the shows that stay on model 100 percent of the time. I prefer things that are wild and crazy and go off-model. I also enjoy working with our animation partners in Korea, Sunmin Image Pictures and Digital eMation,

whose work I trust enormously."

When asked about the secret of his success as an animator, Jones-Quartey is quick to share some solid advice. "I'm kind of jealous of young animation fans today because there is so much high-quality animation produced by people who really care about what they're making. I grew up at a time before Flash animation was popular. Today, you can use your skills to do feature-quality animation at home. The most important thing you can do is not wait

'I prefer things that are wild and crazy and go off-model.'

— Creator Ian Jones-Quartey



The fluid, fun visuals of the show were also very important to the artist/creator, who grew up watching *Tom and Jerry* and *Looney Tunes* shorts on TV. "The look of the show is inspired by animation itself," he explains. "I wanted to create something that was rough around the edges, so we came up with a style that was really based on pencil sketches. The goal was to make viewers feel like they could draw these characters and their world as well. I think anyone who grew up with cartoons can really

for someone else's permission to become an artist or creator. Don't call yourself an 'aspiring' cartoonist or animator. Just do it. Take advantage of your freedom and flexibility to make the art that you want to make. Then, put it online and show it to as many people as you possibly can!" ♦

**OK K.O.! Let's Be Heroes** airs on Cartoon Network Fridays at 6:30 p.m. and on the Cartoon Network app.

# Girl Power Times Four

The creator of Nelvana's *Mysticons* discusses the inspirations behind the fantasy toon. By Ramin Zahed

**S**ean Jara, the mastermind behind Nelvana's hot new animated series *Mysticons*, remembers being obsessed with playing *Dungeons & Dragons* when he was a teen. "I grew up in the 'burbs in the '80s, and my friends and I spent thousands of hours [playing the game]," he recalls. I was the Dungeon Master, which meant I had to come up with all the adventures. We'd play in the basement on an old ping-pong table and order pizza into the wee hours of the morning while I improvised tales of high adventure for my friends. I was constantly thinking of the characters, doing voices, coming up with exciting plot twists, world-building, etc."

an opportunity to address a gap in animated action content for young girls. Once we committed to the new direction, we totally reenvisioned the show, and took great care to make sure we came up with four awesome, unique, and relatable girl heroes. Everything else spun out from that."

The creators of the show wanted the *Mysticons* universe to be both magical and relatable. "We thought of ways to put a magical spin on everyday items and tech," says Jara. "We've got flying cars, flying mageboards, and bangle-phones, which are like cell phones that flip off your wrist, so you can make calls or glyph. 'Glyphing' is our world's

magic seem that much bigger."

He is also quick to note that the fact that 80 percent of the writers on the show are women makes a huge difference. "I relied on the talents of Shelley Scarrow, Stephanie Kaliner, Jocelyn Geddie, Ash Lannigan, Tally Knoll, Sandra Kasturi, Elize Morgan, Amanda Spagnolo, Grant Sauvé and Corey Liu to come up with dynamic adventures that would be relatable and inspiring to young girls," he says.

"Personally, I believe great shows are creator-driven and come from a strong and unique point of view," Jara adds. "Nelvana saw my passion for fantasy-action, and then paired me with an amazing director, Matt Ferguson,



Jara, whose many writing credits include *Degrassi: The Next Generation*, *The League of Super Evil*, *Johnny Test* and the upcoming *ReBoot: The Guardian Code*, says he took all those fantasy stories and mixed them together with an urban environment to make them more relatable to young, modern audiences for *Mysticons*. "The idea was Middle-earth meets Manhattan with a band of cool girl heroes who defend the realm."

The series, which is a collaboration between Nelvana, Playmates Toys, Topps and Nickelodeon, was originally developed as a show targeting boys, but it changed direction during development. The toon now centers on four dynamic heroines who are brought together by a prophecy to battle evil and protect their world from the evil Queen Necrafa.

"*Mysticons* did start out as a boys' action show and that was my expertise, which is why Nelvana brought me aboard," notes Jara. "But during development, we discovered there was

version of texting. We even created our own runic alphabet for it."

Produced by Jara and Suzie Gallo, the show features animation done in-studio at Canada's Nelvana, along with Yeti Farm in Vancouver, utilizing Toon Boom Harmony to deliver its dazzling mix of 2D and 3D elements.

## A Touch of Jones, Avery and Pixar

Jara, who grew up with the classic shorts of Chuck Jones and Tex Avery, and mentions Ralph Bakshi, Brad Bird and John Lasseter as sources of inspiration, says one of the main qualities that makes *Mysticons* stand out is its enigmatic blend of magical and everyday elements. "Yes, it's a fantasy show and there's tons of action and magic, but our main characters are real; more like everyday teens," he points out. "Personally, that's my favorite tone for a show—something that is rooted in reality, because it makes all the fantasy and

and a team of super-pro designers and animators. Then, they not only trusted us, but did everything they could to ensure that we would succeed in our quest. That goes for all our partners from Nickelodeon, to Playmates, to Tornante."

The creative writer, who has been a constant player in the world of TV animation for the past couple of decades, is also quite generous with career tips.

"Study the masters," he advises. "Work hard, and work as much as you can. Find your voice. Play well with others. Learn to give and take criticism. And never give up. Persistence is the most important thing. Take rejection letters and fuel your forge of creativity with them. But also, be gracious when you have finally found success." ♦

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***Mysticons* airs Sundays at noon on Nickelodeon and also debuts on YTV and Teletoon in Canada this month.**

# A unique hub of creativity, great ideas and fresh talent

Viborg is just a tiny dot on the world map, yet great things continue to happen there! Occupying the remnants of an old military facility, The Animation Workshop/VIA University College (TAW) is a buzzing hub of young talent. TAW enjoys a strong and wide-reaching reputation due to the top educations they provide for the international film industry, yet it is much more than a school:

"TAW is a mix of a very progressive educational environment and an artistic development 'playground'. You have the Animation and Graphic Storytelling BAs, which represent entertainment, and then you have the Open Workshop artist residency supporting imaginative artistic experiments mixing animation, installation art and the newest technologies," says Morten Thorning, Centre Director of TAW.

At TAW the main ingredient is people with talent and great ideas. And with three bachelor degrees, two currently-running artist residencies and three more in the pipeline, the facilities house more than 500 diverse talents from across the world. The underlying philosophy here is that in order to help talents grow and develop it is TAW's job to create the best possible production facilities, social settings, and artistic inspiration.

## Art and Technology

One of the newest initiatives from TAW is

the creation of a movement - a manifest - for the international installation art scene. By making use of the high production value of professional animation, the goal is to expand the possibilities of what one can do and say with installation art:

**"Art and animation is like a match made in heaven. It is the ultimate tool for looking into the unimagined."**

The award winning short film *Nothing Happens* by Michelle and Uri Kranot is a perfect example of the ongoing experimentation with art and animation. *Nothing Happens* is part of the VR-programme at this year's Venice Biennale. Another artistic animation experiment coming out of TAW in 2017 will be the animated jazz symphony *Solar Walk*. *Solar Walk* is a high quality, live artistic performance combining original modern jazz big band music, poetic songs, and animated images.

## Animated Science - turning research into great stories

Animation is a powerful communication tool and a guiding ambition at TAW is discovering and unfolding all of its potential. In line with this TAW is hosting a conference this fall focusing entirely on Scientific Visualisation – engaging animators and scientists in a discussion and debate on how to turn complicated research into interesting stories.



The Animation Workshop / VIA University College (TAW) was founded in 1988 by Morten Thorning. In 2017 TAW became Denmark's Centre for Animation, Visualization and Graphic Storytelling, thanks to a grant from the Danish Ministries of Culture and Education.

TAW's BA educations (Character Animation, Computer Graphic Arts and Graphic Storytelling) are taught by professionals and freelancers from the international industry, approximately 60% of whom are from the US. TAW also offers artist residencies, professional courses and workshops.

# THE ANIMATION WORKSHOP



**Center for  
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Visualization &  
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**ANIMATED  
SCIENCE**

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DEVELOPMENT**

**VISUAL  
STORYTELLING**



# Full Circle

**Sprung from the comics biz, Man of Action has flourished as animation hit-makers ready to cement their signature creation *Ben 10* as an evergreen franchise.**

By Tom McLean

You know the name—you may know the names behind the name—but few can deny the success that creative studio Man of Action has had in its nearly 20-year lifespan.

Comprised of creators Joe Casey, Joe Kelly, Duncan Rouleau and Steven T. Seagle, Man of Action burst from the comic-book industry into the animation scene with the 2005 debut on Cartoon Network of *Ben 10*, a boys' action series about 10-year-old Ben Tennyson and the high-tech watch that allows him to transform into 10 aliens to defend the Earth from various threats. It was followed by *Generator Rex*, also on Cartoon Network and based on a comic. The most high-profile gig the group has had was credit for creating the characters of *Big Hero 6*—which first appeared in a 1997 issue of Marvel's *Alpha*

fun to be had in finding guys you liked working with was pretty much all the fun there was to be had," says Seagle.

The group migrated one by one to rival DC Comics to work on the Superman franchise, which Seagle says was in a dark moment of its own. "The first story conference I went to, they said don't draw any attention to the Superman books for the next year, which I thought didn't sound very fun," he says. "And by that point, we were like, we should make stuff up with each other together, but not necessarily under the direct employ of a big corporation. So that's what we started doing."

Rouleau says the first official Man of Action projects were a series of short live-action films that never saw the light of day, followed by work on the *X-Men: Legends* videogame, which was

was alleviated to a degree by Kelly's experience working at 4Kids as a story editor and writer on an animated *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* series under the tutelage of producer Lloyd Goldfine. Rouleau also had animation experience as a character designer on *Loonatics Unleashed* at Warner Bros. and on various projects at Stan Lee Media, before it imploded amid a political scandal.

"As far as credits go, we didn't have enough for Cartoon Network to hand us the keys to *Ben 10* at the time," says Seagle. "So we developed it, we consulted on it, we wrote a bunch of episodes... but it was always under a different show runner."

## Ahead of the Times

Moving beyond *Ben 10*, the group found its comics background a benefit as that medium's

Man of Action's brought *Ben 10* back to its evergreen roots for Cartoon Network's reboot.



*Flight* series, and became an Oscar-winning animated feature for Disney.

And now, the group's diverse interests have brought them back to a reimagined *Ben 10*, which premiered last October internationally and rolled out April 17 in the United States, with a second season already ordered.

## A Four-Color Origin

All four members got their start—and first met each other—in the comic-book industry. Seagle says he knew Casey from before he started in comics 30 years ago, and met Rouleau through another comics creator friend. Kelly he met when they both were hired to write the main X-Men titles in 1997, a time when Marvel was in bankruptcy court with no clear exit strategy.

"It was not the joyous Marvel of now, so the

released in 2004. "We were most definitely using all our different contacts to establish ourselves as either the producers or the writers on things, because each of us had different backgrounds," says Rouleau.

The group got into animation through one of those connections: Matthew Senreich, a former editor at *Wizard* magazine, who was at the time working with actor Seth Green to launch *Robot Chicken*. Senreich suggested Man of Action meet with Sam Register, then VP at Cartoon Network, for which the group showed up with 20 ideas, a bell and a timer, with a plan to pitch one per minute. One of those pitches became *Ben 10*; another became *Generator Rex*, their second animated series; and a third has evolved into *Zak Storm: Super Pirate*, produced by ZAG.

The learning curve for working in animation

traditions of long-term continuity and world-building spread into other media.

But the group also doesn't lose sight of what makes each project it takes on work, both on a vision level and in the practical elements. Seagle cites *Mega Man* as an example in which Man of Action was able to combine the most popular elements of the original game with what kind of cartoon kids 7-10 like and with thematic growth that makes it resonate. "We're good at pushing those things together and making something that works for kids and honors the fan side of things, too," he says.

After so many years working together, the members are comfortable with and respect each other's strengths and their overall interest in a project before taking it on. If one member really seems to click with a project, he will become the

lead on it, with the other members supporting that vision.

"Our first step is always everybody throws down different takes and then we just kind of quickly go: 'Oh, your take's better. Let's run with that,'" says Seagle.

If one member is a hard no on a proposed project, the group passes. "There are projects where I thought, 'Well, this will be a no, but I'm interested in it,'" says Seagle. "And then everybody's on board for different reasons. We just look for that consensus."

Despite having worked with such stable, well-known clients as Cartoon Network, Marvel and ZAG, Man of Action follows what Casey describes as "a freelancer mentality writ large" and is open to projects and collaborations with anyone. "We're just used to it from the comic-book world," Casey says. "Back then, it was an economic consideration. Just get as much work as you can—because you're getting paid so little for it—to make up the difference. But that became a mentality that serves you well in that industry because you're not

to do, do we have get scripts to get through, do we have notes to go through. We spend an enormous amount of time just writing emails saying, 'Here's what happened in the last 30 minutes on whatever,' so that we can function like a multi-headed hydra."

### Back to Ben 10

Long-established in animation, Cartoon Network's plan to reboot *Ben 10* and establish it as an evergreen franchise lasting generations, proved an irresistible opportunity for its creators to return and make the show everything they originally imagined. "We were aware they were going to reboot it and we just said, we think we'd



From left: Joe Kelly, Duncan Rouleau, Steven T. Seagle and Joe Casey

gle. "He's Ben 10, he should be 10 years old and have 10 aliens. And so that's kind of how we're running it."

### Sticking with Comics

Comics remain a passion for Man of Action, and its members say they'll always keep a foot in that medium, publishing their titles through Image Comics and retaining creative ownership and control.

"Movies, TV, videogames not only caught up to comic books, they have in a lot of ways outpaced them," says Casey. "So the creative challenge is, in a lot of ways, how do we get back out in the forefront of storytelling with comics?"

The members also keep things flexible enough to allow members to do work on their own and find time to generate new ideas. Kelly says the time difference between his home in New York and the rest of the group in Los Angeles allows him to take mornings to work on his own material, while Seagle goes off-site every Thursday to work just on new ideas.



**Mega Man**



**Generator Rex**

putting all your eggs in one basket."

"We like the make-it-up part of things," adds Seagle. "Usually, when we sign on for a show that's not our own creation, we tell people we're in for the bible, the pilot and a season—and that's all we can commit to. And sometimes we stay another season just because it's fun, like with *Ultimate Spider-Man*."

Man of Action may have only four members, but it has an extensive supporting cast, including a list of about 40 writers who they hire on to their shows and often stay on after the group has left.

"We are a company, so we have a weekly meeting where we go down every project going on or where it is and what's next and we get all that organized," says Seagle. "We have weekly creative meetings on each show. So we're just figuring out, you know, do we have springboards

like to do that reboot, actually, because there is stuff we've loved about it that it moved away from and we want to move it back," says Seagle.

"One thing we learned, even though the shows were great, is that if it's going to exist as a sort of evergreen IP, evergreen brand all its own, you can't age it up," says Casey. "That was a mistake, ultimately. The quality, we can't argue with that. But Mickey Mouse never ages, Bugs Bunny never ages—all the iconic cartoon characters, aging is not a part of their DNA. It's been a very conscious thing and Cartoon Network agrees with us on this."

Seagle says his 84-year-old father put it best when he called up after seeing the character wield more than 10 aliens and said that was wrong for a character named Ben 10. "And I thought, you know, he's right, actually," says Sea-

gle. "Don't expect the group's lineup to change—ever. Their original business document "allows for somebody to leave and nobody else to join, just because that eliminated the need to have that conversation ever," says Seagle.

The group plans to follow its diverse interests, wherever that may lead. Seagle says he thinks they will always have a foot in animation and comics, but anything else is fair play, too. Kelly's live-action movie *I Kill Giants*, adapted from the comics he co-created, is coming to theaters this fall, and Seagle and Rouleau both have been writing live-action TV on top of animation.

Rouleau says the developing world of VR and AR also is something the group finds exciting: "I definitely have an eye on that stuff, and I know that we've had these conversations where we want to get into those fields as well." ♦

# Eight Toons to Watch at MIP Junior

The MIP Junior market in Cannes (Oct. 14-15) is one of the world's biggest showcases for kids' programming. This year features keynotes by Frederator founder Fred Seibert and Netflix's head of global kids content, Andy Yeatman, as well as a World Premiere TV Screening of *Thomas & Friends: Big World! Big Adventures!*. Here are eight shows that are poised to make a big splash at the Junior market (in alphabetical order):

## Andre Furiki, Supersonic Sloth

**Created by:** Frédéric Martin (*Dude, That's My Ghost!*)

**Distributor:** Gaumont

**Package:** 52 x 11

**Target Audience:** Kids 6 - 11



**Synopsis:** This animated comedy follows the adventures of a hyperactive young sloth with oodles of drive! He's the first of his kind to even leave his tree, and he is not stopping there! He wants to shake the dust of this town off his feet and see the world, but, before anything else, he must pass his driving test. His first stop is Racers School, because every herbivore who wants to survive out there needs to learn to drive fast! Or else, you'll end up as a leopard's lunch meat.

**Animation Style:** 2D

**Why It's Awesome:** Given what we know about sloths, that they are the slowest animals

on the face of the earth, it's ironic and wildly entertaining that our main character André is hyperactive and driven by the idea of speed.

**Selling Points:** Vanessa Shapiro, Gaumont's president of worldwide TV distribution & co-pro, says, "This show is quite different to anything else available right now as it's slapstick comedy at its best. André's family just don't understand this hyperactive sloth's drive to drive! But he's dedicated to being the fastest, and together with his animal friends at the racing academy, André gets involved in all sorts of scrapes and adventures. We're excited for the series to premiere very soon on France 3 and Disney XD EMEA."

## Badanamu Cadets

**Created by:** Calm Island

**Distributor:** Imira Entertainment (Spain, Italy, Portugal, Latin America and U.S. Hispanic); LNC Media (France, Benelux, Germany, Switzerland, UK, Scandinavia, North America); Toonz Media (India and Southeast Asia); Calm Island (rest of world).



**Package:** 52 x 11

**Target Audience:** Kids 4-7

**Synopsis:** The series introduces a team of six dynamic, creative, and intrepid heroes-in-training who must work together to protect the balance of nature in Badanamu. Combating the scheming plots and dark plans of the troublemaking Grumbles, our heroes never meet a challenge they can't overcome, a mystery they can't solve, or a disaster they can't avert. Underlying STEAM and social lessons are woven into each heart-thumping adventure chock full of action, humor, and surprise!

**Animation Style:** CGI

**Why It's Awesome:** The world of Badanamu was first created in 2011 as a preschool learning brand, now available in over 30 countries. A series of short videos began rolling out in 2013, available via partners including YouTube, Alibaba, Naver, Roku, and Amazon. Over 200 short videos have received over 2.5 billion views to date. This enthusiasm for the characters of Badanamu led to the development of the series, which has presold to France's Lagardère Active for its Gulli and Tiji channels, and Cartoon Network Italy.

**Selling Points:** David Roberts, CEO of Calm Island, points out, "We have already engaged million of fans with the characters of Badanamu, and we have spent the past two years developing and producing the TV series, which will take their engagement with the characters to a whole new level. Boasting theatrical quality animation, fun storylines, loveable characters and catchy songs, *Badanamu Cadets* is sure to delight kids and their families, too."

## Chamelia

**Created by:** Ethan Long/Technicolor Creative Development



**Producer and Presales:** Technicolor

**Package:** 52 x 11

**Animation Style:** CGI

**Target Audience:** Kids 4-7

**Synopsis:** Based on the original book series from acclaimed author Ethan Long and creator of the Emmy-nominated series *Tasty Time with ZeFronk*, *Chamelia* centers on a six-year-old chameleon, who changes color to match her feelings and embraces life with a flare and style all her own. A starburst of impetuous energy and imaginative fun, *Chamelia* is the best friend everyone wants, and her colorful feelings help connect the community together.

**Animation Style:** CGI

**Why It's Awesome:** No other early preschool animated series clearly explains the complexity of emotions to young viewers.

**Selling Points:** Steven Wendland, VP & creative head of Technicolor Creative Development, points out, "*Chamelia* is uniquely positioned to encourage our young audience to celebrate differences and express who they are. With its emphasis on empathy and the fact that Chamelia changes color to reflect her emotions, children will relate to Chamelia and the situations she finds herself in."

## Dream Street

**Created by:** Nigel Stone of Platinum Films



**Distributor:** MarVista Entertainment

**Package:** 65 x 10

**Target Audience:** Preschoolers, their parents and caregivers

**Synopsis:** Narrated by British comedian Russ Abbot, *Dream Street* follows the charming adventures of Buddy the Magical Truck, Daisy the Police Car and their fun-loving, toy-box friends as they embrace everyday challenges in an imaginative,

playful and inspiring way. Capturing all the joy, excitement and magic of a playground, the show's brightly colored world is filled with incredible edible delights, wondrous toys, games and fantastic gadgets, which come to life at "Magic Time" and stimulate young viewers' imaginations.

**Animation Style:** Rotomorphing: Characters are rotoscoped out of the live-action footage and enhanced with CG animation. The next step is combining the characters with live-action plates and painted backgrounds through compositing. The final look resembles stop-motion, but without the staccato movements, providing movement and a modern edge to the show while retaining the physical presence that only traditional stop-motion animation can achieve.

**Why It's Awesome:** In addition to being directed by double Academy Award-winning vfx master Brian Johnson (*The Empire Strikes Back*, *Alien*), the technology—being shot on 35mm film using motion controlled cameras, remote control and animatronic techniques—behind the brightly colored world of *Dream Street* makes it unique for a preschool series. The authentic and nurturing narrative of the series introduces core themes for preschoolers such as play, friendship, problem solving and community which encourages independence, social interaction, respect and empowerment so they can have a better understanding of others, themselves and the world around them.

**Selling Point:** Fernando Szew, CEO of MarVista Entertainment, notes, "*Dream Street* exemplifies innovation in preschool programming, delivering cutting-edge visuals and promoting core positive social skills to young viewers. From the animation production value to the talent involved in reimagining the series

for a new generation of kids, we believe the magical quality and messaging of the series will appeal to both traditional channels and digital platforms and resonate with young children all over the world."

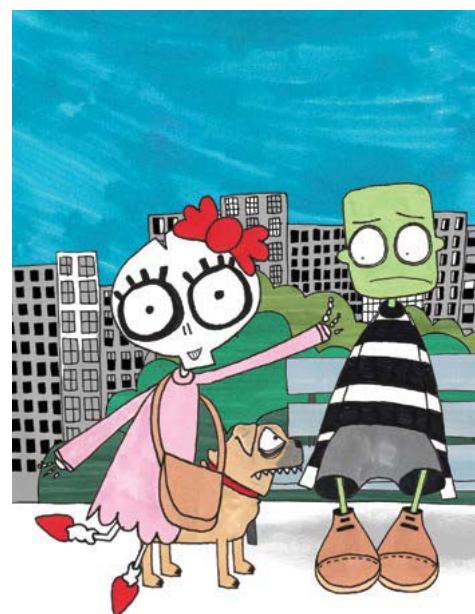
## Frankie and Doris

**Created by:** Ann Riley, Will Broome and Colin Williams

**Distributor:** Sixteen South Rights

**Package:** 52 x 11

**Synopsis:** The show centers on two very different friends: Doris is adopted and doesn't look like anyone in her family, while Frankie is told that he looks just like his father—a man from Norway whom Frankie has never met. Neither has had a best friend before, but when they meet at the school bus stop, an unbreakable friendship is born. Their world



is filled with a host of eclectic characters including family, friends, an enemy or two and even a psychopathic pet puggle!

**Target Audience:** Kids 7 – 11

**Animation Style:** 2D

**Why It's Awesome:** "All the artwork in the show is made using felt-tip pens on paper—not some kind of digital felt-tip or digital paper—the real stuff with the really smelly felt-tips! Like all of our shows, it *really* is hand-made."

**Selling Point:** "In our changing cultural and political climate, *Frankie and Doris* is a series that celebrates difference and accepting others for who they are—no matter what," says Sixteen South's creative director, Colin Williams.



## House of Magic

**Producer:** TeamTO

**Format:** 52 x 11

**Target Audience:** 6-11

**Animation Style:** CGI

**Synopsis:** Have you ever wondered how to pull a rabbit out of a hat, make someone disappear, escape from a locked safe, walk through a solid wall or even read your sister's mind? The House of Magic, run by legendary magician and illusionist Lawrence Deweerde, is just the place to find out! Dylan, Izzy, Zach, Vincent and Veronica all have a gift for illusion, conjuring, misdirection and all things magical, so this summer they're attending magic camp to live out their dream of becoming magicians—and friends! Based on the hit feature film from Studio Canal.

**Why It's Awesome:** The series is set in the original background of a Magic School for aspiring magicians, run by a world-famous illusionist.

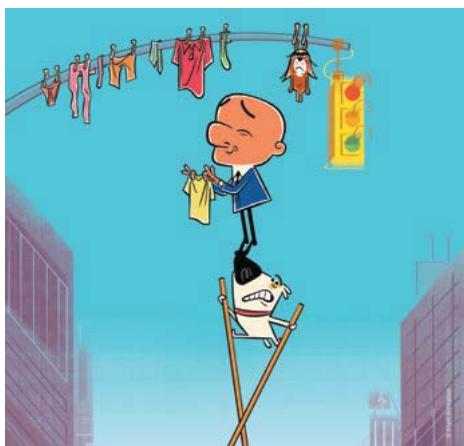
**Selling Points:** Corinne Kouper, TeamTO's head of development and executive producer, "We are so happy to have director Christian De Vita working on this exciting project with his unique passion. *School of Magic* will undoubtedly benefit from his special touch, after having directed our movie *Yellowbird*, and now directing the third season of *PJ Masks*, the flagship preschool show he helped create."

## Mr. Magoo

**Producer:** Xilam Animation

**Format:** 78 x 7

**Target Audience:** Kids 6-11, and classic cartoon fans



**Animation Style:** 2D

**Synopsis:** This new take on the classic animated star of the UPA series (first introduced in 1949) offers new adventures of the dynamic, kind-hearted and helpful character, who wreaks havoc without his glasses. All of his neighbors have kindly adjusted to his uniqueness...except for one: a megalomaniac hamster by the name of Fizz whose sole goal is to have all of humanity recognize his tremendous genius. He's determined to leave his mark on history, but somehow Magoo always interferes, thus preventing Fizz from carrying out his crazy plans!

**Why It's Awesome:** Who doesn't love the amazing Mr. Magoo, who has been delighting animation lovers since he was first introduced in 1949? He has even received two Best Animated Short Oscars. Xilam has introduced various modern elements to the mix for today's audiences, but the classic comedic elements still resonate.

**Selling Points:** Xilam's founder and president, Marc De Pontavice, notes, "Bringing Mr. Magoo back to life is a wonderful opportunity to reach a new generation of viewers and to creatively build on the innovative original series. We look forward to bringing back the heart and humor as only Mr. Magoo can deliver, but also adding new strong characters



such as Mr. Cat (his dog!) and his opponent, Mr. Fizz (a lunatic hamster), to make the show rich in both the cute and comedy factors. Visually spectacular and featuring a brilliant hip-hop soundtrack, the series has gathered the best story artists and animators from Xilam studio to make the show perfectly pitched for wide international appeal."

## Tulipop

**Package:** 52 x 11

**Created by:** Icelandic illustrator Signy Kolbeinsdottir

**Distributor:** TBC

**Target Audience:** Kids 7-12

**Synopsis:** This action-comedy show is set in fantasy world filled with flawed but loveable characters. The island of Tulipop, drawn from an eclectic Icelandic heritage, is an absurd and surprising universe where nothing is quite what it seems. The quirky characters may appear cute and adorable, but they are all flawed in different ways and face problems and challenges that create conflict. Like any



family, they love each other, but they don't always like each other.

**Animation Style:** 2D

**Why It's Awesome:** After seven years as a successful design-led character brand with a range of cool and colorful products, Tulipop has now been developed for animation with a top-notch creative team, which includes Tobi Wilson, lead writer on *The Amazing World of Gumball*, and award-winning directors Simon Cartwright (*Manoman*) and Nina Gantz (*Edmond*) in a co-production with London-based Blink Industries.

**Selling Points:** Helga Árnadóttir, CEO of Tulipop, points out, "Ever since the launch of Tulipop in 2010, we've been asked when the animated show was happening, so we are thrilled to now be presenting an original TV series which is authentic and true to Signy's beautiful Tulipop. This original world, which has already gained so many fans around the world, is based on Signy's family and friends and inspired by people's flaws, eccentricities and quirks." ♦

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# Everybody Loves Louie!

Millimages' new animated series *Louie & Yoko Build* promises to be one of the hot properties at Cartoon Forum this month.

**L**ouie, the charming white rabbit star of Millimages' animated series, is getting ready to star in a new spinoff. The French studio's upcoming 78 x 7-minute series is titled *Louie & Yoko Build* (French version: *Didou et Yoko: Construis-Moi*) and aims to teach young viewers everything they need to know about constructing items as wide-ranging as cars, houses, rockets, bridges and swimming pools. This sequel to the studio's hugely popular *Louie* is bound to impress buyers and co-pro partners at this month's Cartoon Forum event in France.

"*Louie* is seen in 200 countries and gets over a million viewers every day on YouTube and other platforms," says Roch Lener, chairman and CEO of Millimages and the show's producer. "It's a famous brand, and viewers enjoy watching the adventures of Louie and his friend Yoko, the ladybird. In this new show, Louie has a magic toolbox from which he takes out all the equipment he needs. Together, with the viewers, they build what they need, whether it's a house, a car or even a rocket."

Lener, whose many animation credits include global hits such as *64 Zoo Lane*, *Mouk* and *Molang*, says a lot of his company's research shows that children are and have always been interested in building things. "Audiences enjoyed learning about drawing from Louie, so now they will get to watch him construct all these different objects. It's about showing



*Louie & Yoko Build*

kids (age two to five) that if you want to do something, you need to set your mind to it and start from the beginning and proceed step by step. It's a great point to learn psychologically. It shows the path to self-learning."

Lener and his team at Millimages have learned many lessons from the success of the *Louie* series, which was first introduced in 2006. "The show has huge audiences on TV, but was also able to create more fans on video platforms," he points out. "*Louie* has a very distinctive, special design, which is based on the work of popular children's author and illustrator Yves Got. There are some shows

that do well in new media and some that perform well on TV. It's very rare when they are able to succeed on both platforms. That is certainly true for *Louie*."

In addition to *Louie & Yoko Build*, Millimages will be focusing on expanding its other successful preschool show *Molang*. The charming non-dialogue comedy (104 x 3) centers on the adventures of an outgoing rabbit and a shy, emotional little chick. "I think *Molang* is quite magical because people feel connected with the stories and the characters," explains Lener. "It's about friendship and empathy, and its subjects are part of our daily lives."

According to Lener, *Molang* is also performing very well in 200 countries on TV and on VOD and new media platforms. He notes, "Not only is it popular with preschoolers, it also has a big following with their parents. We see young adults sharing *Molang* images on Pinterest, Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook. We are launching a big merchandising plan for the property late this fall and in early 2018."

Also on the studio's upcoming slate is a second season of *Pirata & Capitano*, and finalizing the financing for *Kung Fu Brothers*, two previous Cartoon Forum successes. ♦



# The Sky's the Limit

**Cyber Group Studios fires all cylinders this fall with several new properties at the markets.**

Paris based animation powerhouse Cyber Group Studios is making major strides on several different fronts as it embarks on a very busy fall season. With 19 major animated projects in various stages of development and production, the toon house is forging ahead as it builds on the global success of recent hits such as *Zorro the Chronicles*, *Mirette Investigates* and *Zou*.

"I look at this year as one of the busiest our studio has ever had both in terms of production and development," says Pierre Sissmann, chairman and CEO of the 12-year-old company. "We have reorganized our resources, have three shows signed with major networks, and have six productions that we haven't shown to anyone yet. We are also looking at developing feature films in the next five years. When I was at Disney, I produced features such as *DuckTales*, *Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *Tarzan*. But when I started Cyber Group Studios, I knew that it was too risky to jump into the feature film arena right away, so we put our focus on TV series."

One of the recent highlights for the studio has been the upcoming preschool series *Gigantosaurus*, which will premiere on Disney Junior worldwide (excluding India and Taiwan) in 2019. The show, which has already been picked up by France Televisions and Super RTL in Germany, is based on the bestselling book by Jonny Duddle about the adventures of four young dino pals, who go in search of the biggest dinosaur anyone has ever seen. "Another big project for us is *The Pirates Next Door*, which was commissioned by France TV," adds Sissmann. "It's also based on another Jonny Duddle book, which has sold millions worldwide, and next year, we'll begin production on Duddle's *Jack and the Thesaurus*. These are all ambitious series for us, and they have big toy properties as well."

The team at Cyber Group also has high hopes for *Taffy*, a 78 x 7-minute comedy project with Turner International for its Boomerang channel, across international markets. "I created this show with Mike de Seve of Baboon Animation," says Sissmann. "It follows the adventures of a loyal dog named Bentley whose elderly billionaire owner takes in an imposter, posing as a wide-eyed fluffy cat. It has a great *Looney Tunes*, slap-sticky feel to it."

Another hot item on the Cyber slate is



'We are very proud of *Droners* because it has a very distinctive look, offering a rich mixture of CGI and 2D...We are always looking at solving the next technological challenges with our shows.'

— Cyber Group Studios Chairman and CEO Pierre Sissmann



*Droners*, a co-pro with Supamonks Studio, La Chouette Compagnie and TFI. This 26 x 26-minute show is aimed at children aged six to 10, and is based on an original concept by Supamonks' director of production Pierre de Cabisse and La Chouette producer Sylvain Dos Santos. The innovative toon follows four members of a drone racing team known as the Tikis, who are trying to save their archipelago home, Terraqua, from marine submersion. They will have to compete in one of the most difficult drone racing competitions in the world.

"We are very proud of this project because it has a very distinctive look, offering a rich mixture of CGI and 2D," notes Sissmann. "We are always looking at solving the next technological challenges with our shows. For *Tatonka*, we had to develop an effective way of depicting animals in motion, with realistic muscle and textures. For *Zorro*, we were tasked with creating hundreds of animated characters per episode. Now, with *Droners*, we have full CG, 3D drones racing in a 2D environment, and we are going to create different perspectives, just like a videogame. We want the viewer to feel as if they're in the driver seat. It will be spectacular."

At this month's Cartoon Forum, Cyber Group will also present *King of Space*, a whimsical CG series about a young boy named Ralph and his dog Rex who live on a tiny planet called Oopaluna. After discovering that the dog has royal origins, the young boy enrolls him in a training program for future kings of space.

Overall, Sissmann says he is pleased that Cyber Group has expanded its reach in France, the U.K, Ireland and the U.S. "We are also setting up a digital division before the end of the year. In the next five years, we hope to create more TV series, both with old and new clients, as well as moving forward with our movie and digital divisions. I think in general, the market has been better for us than it has ever been. The growth of new digital platforms has been a very positive trend for everyone. Of course, there have been hiccups here and there, but overall, it's a great period. There is demand for comedy, action and fantasy shows, and both boys' and girls' series. Seven years ago, preschool or bridge shows were all about animals. Now it's all about boys and girls! It's a very balanced field now!"

To find out more about this thriving French outfit, visit [www.cybergrouppstudios.com](http://www.cybergrouppstudios.com). ♦



# The Toon Pitch Parade of Toulouse

**The projects featured at this year's Cartoon Forum offer a dazzling diversity of visuals and subject matter.**

Each September, European animation producers, investors and broadcasters head over to the beautiful French city of Toulouse, located on the banks of the Garonne river, to attend the prestigious Cartoon Forum event (Sept. 11-14). Since its launch in 1990, over 700 animated projects have found financing at the Forum, so it's easy to understand why each year more and more toon professionals are drawn to this special gathering.

In addition to the usual pitching sessions and screenings, the Forum will focus on one specific country, and this year it's Poland and its 30 studios. "Since last year, we decided to put the animated projects of one special country in the spotlight," explains general director Marc Vandeweyer. "[Poland]'s professional association is fighting to pass a 25 percent tax credit law, which would strengthen its will to become a co-production partner, including partnerships in ambitious projects. The know-how of the Polish studios is widely recognized and their creativity has become increasingly contemporary and well in tune with our times."

Vandeweyer says, as in years past, the projects and the creativity behind them are the stars of the Forum. "European producers dare to innovate in terms of modern and unusual graphic styles, and deliver intelligent content for kids and

new target groups such as young adults," he notes. "These shows not only aim to entertain, but also push the envelope with their clever scripts."

Commenting on the overall state of the European scene, Vandeweyer says he sees the animation industry as quite booming in many different regions of the continent. "The studios are working a lot," he says. "They even have a shortage of animators. This sector has a great potential as the producers co-produce easily with other countries: They can adapt quickly to new technological developments, they sell their series and feature films all over the world. The European Commission in Brussels has consulted extensively to the animation professionals to create an 'Animation Plan for Europe,' which is quite ambitious and meets the needs of the sector. The animation professionals in the region are

expecting a new impetus and focus to improve their success commercially and to make their industry stronger than it is today."

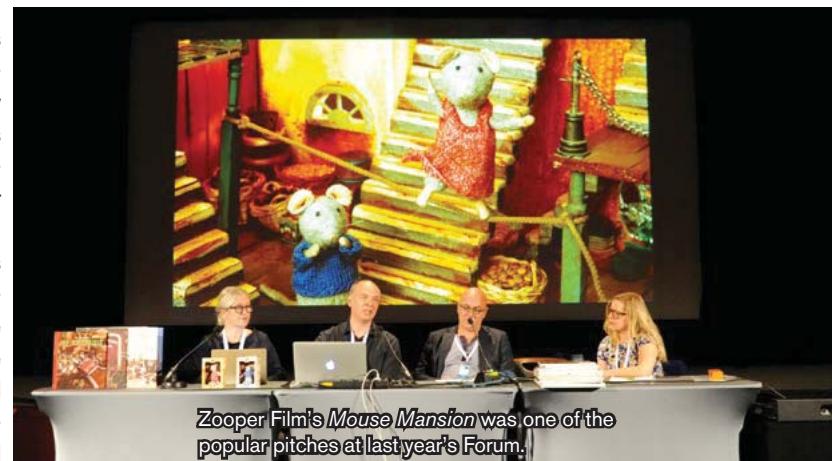
## Dragons, Dinosaurs and Space Kings

Among the many projects that will be showcased at the Forum this year are:

Anima Pictures' *Balloon Marco*, Animoon's *I Love This*, Fabrique d'Images and WunderWerk's *Millie*, Millimages' *Louie Builds*, Kavaleer's *Neenawsaur!*, Media Valley's *Dragon Slayer's Academy*, Studio 100's *Galactic Agency*, Cyber Group Studios' *King of Space*, Gruppo Alcuni and Warsaw Movie Home's *Leo Da Vinci*, Xilam's *Moka*, A. Film's *The Knomes*, TeamTO and Nexus Factory's *The School of Magic* and Collingwood's *Thorgar*.

Andrew Kavanagh, CEO and founder of Dublin-based Kavaleer Productions, is bringing *Neenawsaur!*, a new preschool show featuring a group of dinosaurs with sirens. He says, "I think we've got a fresh approach to story that kids will really love—all the stuff we're not meant to do in preschool storytelling—tantrums, meltdowns and hissy-fits—they're the triggers for a Neenawsaur emergency," he says.

"This will be our eighth at-



**Akissi**  
(GHWA Prod.)

tendance at Cartoon Forum, so I think the fact we keep going back year on year speaks volumes about its efficacy for launching a show," Kavanagh points out. "It's also a great opportunity to check in with ourselves and figure out how we should be developing new properties for a content-landscape that's shifting more rapidly than at any time in the 16 years that Kavaleer's been in business. There's no better way for an IP-focused producer to connect with the industry, and seeing so many great European shows launched is a great way for us to tap into the creative mainspring of content development on this continent."

As Nima Yousefi, producer and director of Sweden's Hobab studio, whose show *Moonwolves* debuted at Cartoon Forum last year, points out, "Having your content at Cartoon Forum will put it on the animation map to attract buyers and distributors to come on board the project. You also receive great feedback from the experts on how to continue to develop the program."

Marie-Claude Beauchamp, president of Montreal-based CarpeDiem Film & TV, is bringing her new animated series *Snowsnaps* (a TV spin-off of the studio's *Snowtime* feature) to the Forum this year, after presenting it last fall for financing. "We are very pleased to offer the finished project to the Forum participants this September," says Beauchamp. "Our presentation confirmed to us that buyers were appreciative of the boldness of our approach and that they would be there when the series will be ready."

Of course, one of the best things about Cartoon Forum is that when all is said and done, it is the quality of the pitched projects that make the difference. "It's important to dare," Vandeweyer notes. "The Cartoon Forum is a boutique event and is much more accessible to new producers than MIPCOM, for instance. At the Forum, only the quality of the project is important—not the size of the presenting company. Our event is perfectly designed for newcomers. If their projects are really good, they will be immediately in the spotlight."

**For more info, visit [www.cartoon-media.eu/cartoon-forum](http://www.cartoon-media.eu/cartoon-forum).**





# Double Exposure

**Two highly original, new films by Japanese auteur Masaaki Yuasa will be showcased at this year's Ottawa International Animation Festival.**

Over the past 10 years, Japanese TV and film director, writer and storyboard artist Masaaki Yuasa has received a lot of attention for his trademark free-form style and TV projects such as *Ping Pong*, *The Tatami Galaxy* and *Kaiba*, and short film *Kick-Heart*. Yuasa also directed and animated the acclaimed "Food Chain" episode of *Adventure Time* during its sixth season. This month, two of the 52-year old's feature films will make a splash at the Ottawa International Animation Festival.

The first feature, *Night Is Short, Walk On Girl*, is based on Tomihiko Morimi's (*Tamako Market*) novel of the same name. The director produced the film at his Science SARU studio, based on a script by Makoto Ueda. The movie centers on an upperclassman who falls in love with a younger student (The Girl with Black Hair) and tries to win her heart. The film

features character designs by Yusuke Nakamura, who also worked on *Tatami Galaxy*.

Yuasa's second movie of 2017, *Lu Over the Wall*, opened in Japan last May and won the Cristal for Feature Film at the Annecy International Animated Film Festival. The film charts the adventures of a middle school boy who moves with his father from Tokyo to a small fishing town after his parents' divorce. There, he makes new friendships, meets a mermaid and ultimately learns to be courageous and open up his heart to life's possibilities. Also produced by Science SARU, the film was penned by Yuasa and Reiko Yoshida, with character designs by Youko Nemu.

"Whether you are credited with the script for an animated film or not, the time you spend on the project doesn't change much," explains Yuasa in an email interview. "During the mak-

ing of one movie, the pre-production for the second movie started. Many artists from the first movie also worked on the second one. One of the biggest challenges these days is attracting and keeping good talent, so I think it's very efficient to work on two projects almost simultaneously. The work overlapped in many instances at our studio, but we were able to make it happen smoothly."

## Different Styles for Different Projects

Yuasa has used both Flash technology and traditional animation techniques in his work before, but he says what is most important is the talent that works on each film. "We rely on the talent of many artists, so the quality of the film is safe regardless of the method we use," he says. "Flash allows you to complete



a project with fewer staff members. Also, because the vector lines can be applied in various ways, they allow more flexibility. We can change the style or patterns of the animated film depending on the demands of the project. I think I use a certain style to take advantage of my strengths and cover up my shortcomings."

When asked about his influences, Yuasa mentions a wide range of artists. "I have been influenced by both animated and live-action films," he explained. "I have been inspired by the works of Hayao Miyazaki, of course. *Spirited Away* is a favorite, but I've also admired many of his TV work, including *Future Boy Conan*." He also includes the films of Tsutomu Shibayama, Shun Izaki, Steven Spielberg, Yasujiro Ozu, Brian De Palma, Tex Avery, Akira Kurosawa and Alfred Hitchcock, as well as George Dunning's *Yellow Submarine* among his all-time favorites.

In *Night Is Short*, Yuasa also pays homage to the great American musicals. "I love classic American musicals, films like *Singin' in the Rain* and *West Side Story*. I think it's exciting to see music synchronized with images on the big screen: Audiences always respond to spectacular productions like that. We have a



Masaaki Yuasa

musical parody scene in the movie, but it's not done in a full-scale cinematic scale. Some day, I hope to make an authentic animated musical."

Yuasa says it's equally challenging to adapt a work based on an existing property as it is to direct an original project. "You always try to come up with the best version of a story that is suitable to the medium, whether it's a short, TV series, or a movie," he notes. "You need to consider your abilities, your reason for making the project and what is the best way to approach a project technically. I believed that

styles should change to match the material, and I was taught that the mark of a skilled animator is the ability to change their style easily."

The self-reinventing director's next project is an adaptation of the manga *Devilman Crybaby*, which will be produced by Science SARU for Netflix. The series will be written by Ichiro Okouchi and Eunyoung Choi is the animation director. Yuasa says he is conscious of the international audience of his movies and TV shows when he's working on a project, but he also doesn't think that you have to make drastic changes for overseas viewers. "When I worked on my Kickstarter project *Kick-Heart* a few years ago, I was aware of the overseas potential, but I felt that it really didn't impact my creative decisions that much," he says.

When asked about attending the Ottawa festival, Yuasa says he loves the loose format and convivial vibes of the event. "Although it is a major animation festival, I feel that is very easy to enjoy and feels quite intimate," he says. "In addition, everyone in the city seems to be a fan of animation. Even my taxi driver loved to talk about animation with me. I am very pleased and honored that both movies were selected to be part of the festival this year." ♦

# No Time for Conventional Narratives!

**The 2017 Edition of the Ottawa International Animation Festival promises to deliver a fresh slate of inspiring, highly original and irreverent toons.**

The fall season officially begins this month when the much-loved Ottawa International Animation Festival opens its doors for a week of cutting-edge shorts, features, mind-expanding panels and dynamic parties. The event, which runs September 20-24 at various venues in Ottawa, Ontario, promises to be another memorable experience.

The 2017 edition will showcase 92 films selected from 1,992 entries from 20 different countries. Among the highlights are Mark Romanek and JAY-Z's *The Story of O.J.* (designed and animated by The Mill and Titmouse), Clyde Petersen's *Torrey Pines*, Abhishek Verma's *Fish Curry*, Frank Ternier's *Riot*, Emilio Ramos' *Nos Faltan*, Eva Cvjanović's *Hedgehog's Home* and Ross Hogg's *Life Cycles*. The Official Competition also serves up five features, including two from Japanese filmmaker Masaaki Yuasa: *Lu Over the Wall* and *Night Is Short, Walk on Girl*.

"There is a definite air of defiance, not just in terms of content, but also through stylistic choices and a rejection of conventional narrative storytelling," notes the festival's artistic director Chris Robinson. "After I programmed the competition films, I just sort of looked back and saw that every screening had a few films that were somehow defiant. By that I mean films with unharvested expressions about race, politics, economic systems, sexual

identity, domestic and sexual abuse. It felt like a lot of animators were trying to desperately make sense of the weirdness of the world right now."

Robinson says the OIAF's cool trailer film by Peter Millard is a personal favorite.

"I can't wait to hear the many mixed reactions from the audience," he explains. "We have a lot of great special screening, including Nora Twomey's adaptation of *The Breadwinner*. The tributes to Evelyn Lambart, Folimage and Bob Sabiston feel long

petition (Panorama) and rejection (boy, that's such a strong word). It shouldn't be rejection, maybe just 'didn't fit' sounds softer, and more honest in fact. This year felt really tough. I'm sure we ditched the equivalent of one competition screening. We made a decision long ago to keep our competition modest and on the small side. It makes it tougher, but I think that's a good thing."

When it comes to dishing out advice to animators, Robinson keeps it simple and straightforward: "I can

give you one tip only: Make the film you want to make, a work that makes you happy," he says. "It doesn't matter whether you dream of being an indie or studio animator. Same rule should apply. Don't make it for your teachers, parents, pharmacists or friends. Don't make it for festivals. Don't make it for studios, squirrels or wombats. Just make it for

you and you only. It will find an audience—or it won't!"

Of course, we had to ask him about the most annoying trends he has seen in animation festivals around the world! "I need a lot of pages: cats, drenching your film in piano sounds, VR, alienated protagonists drifting through some mysterious, barren landscape. Oh, and this full, colorful graphic style that maybe has roots in the works of Nicolas Ménard, Alex Grigg and Eoin Duffy. That cotton candy graphic style is everywhere now. Please stop it!"

**For more info, visit [www.animationfestival.ca](http://www.animationfestival.ca).**

'The OIAF is fun. Where else do you get great films, lots of parties, like-minded weirdos with similar interests, a giant picnic and a pumpkin-carving contest?'

— Artistic director Chris Robinson



overdue. We also have a program about unusual techniques along with one featuring happy films about the end of the world."

His favorite part of the job? "For me, it's really finishing the competition. That's the moment when the identity of that particular festival gets its face and feel... It's quite an exciting mix of films this year, and it's always a thrill to see how an audience will react to them—even the negative reactions can be exciting!" On the flip side of the coin is the challenge of seeing many films begin rejected. "It's such a fine line between competition, out of com-

*The Breadwinner*



*Hedgehog's Home*



# Viva El Festival!

The annual Mexican animation event ups the ante with more high-powered stars and inspiring panels and programs.

The town of Cuernavaca in Mexico will once again host another highly anticipated edition of Pixelatl's El Festival September 5 thru 10. The 2017 event showcases a wide variety of animation greats, including the likes of Henry Selick (*Coraline*), Hal Hickel (*Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*), Daniel Chong (*We Bare Bears*), Dara Terrace (*DuckTales*), David Feiss (*Cow and Chicken*), Alberto Vázquez (*Psychonauts*), Jhonen Vasquez (*Invader Zim*), Enrique Gato (*Tad, the Lost Explorer*), Alan Ituriel (*Villainous*) and Mike Hollingsworth (*BoJack Horseman*).

In addition, El Festival will draw over 90 speakers from 13 countries, and will also feature executives from studios, channels, and broadcasters that will see pitches from Latin American creators at the "IdeaToon Summit." Key players from Cartoon Network, Discovery Kids, Nickelodeon, Netflix, PBS, Disney, Sony Pictures Animation, Amazon Studios, and Televisa will be on hand to share their expertise and review pitches from the Latin American animation talent.

"Every year we work very hard to bring the artists that have created or are developing trends in the animated world," says festival director José Iñesta. "Christian Bermejo, who is in charge of the program, works all year long to find key artists in the industry as well as executives that might be interested in co-producing with Mexico. As a festival, we like to cross the different disciplines of animation, we bring traditional animators, CGI artists, but also videogame programmers and illustrators who create a lot of animation in their jobs."

One of the big highlights of the festival this

year is the keynote address by Daniel Chong, the creator of Cartoon Network's popular show *We Bare Bears*. Also on the highly anticipated list are masterclasses offered by *Invader Zim* creator Jhonen Vasquez and with *DuckTales* showrunner Dara Terrace on the importance of storyboarding and delivering a fresh take on a classic property.

"We also have videogame experts talking talk about hybrid reality and how animation and interaction can engage audiences," adds Iñesta. "We have *Assassin's Creed* programmer Aleissia Laidacker and Teddy Dief, creative director from Square Enix, who will share their ideas about the future of gaming. Because we are very interested in the future of content, we have several VR experts to talk about the new frontier of content development. Jorge Gutiérrez (director, *The Book of Life*) will lead a panel from Google Spotlight Stories' team that will discuss the challenges of storytelling in this new medium. We will also screen Jorge's VR short, *Son of Jaguar*."

This year's lucky attendees will also get to experience an event called "Gourmet Animation," for which chefs have prepared five dishes inspired by five animated shorts. Another big draw is a specially *Song of the Jaguar*-themed fiesta to celebrate *Animation Magazine's* 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary! "This is a great opportunity to celebrate with magazine publisher Jean Thoren and to remind everyone about the importance of having publications devoted to animation



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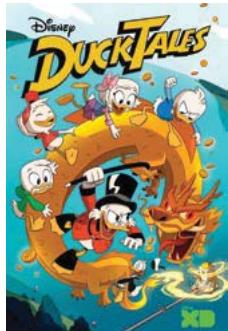


José Iñesta

and to inform everyone about all the great work that is done all around the world," notes Iñesta. "To summarize, this festival will be full of surprises and experiences that will transcend the screens."

Iñesta says he is very pleased that El Festival Pixelatl has become the meeting point of most of the creators and artists in Mexico. "Thanks to this event, major channels and broadcasters have discovered properties that they have optioned or that they are developing with the local talent," he notes. "Our next challenge is to continue to support the local community to produce their IPs and also link them with the international community, because we have focused on the production side for the past five years. Now that we have the basis to create content, we need to move forward and help the studios distribute their content to the world!"♦

**For more info about this unique annual event, visit [www.elfestival.mx](http://www.elfestival.mx).**



# The Art of Curbing CG Noise

**How a UCSB computer science student helped Pixar develop a new noise-eliminating solution.**  
**By Ellen Wolff**

For many people, the words "Monte Carlo" conjure images of high-stakes casinos serving cocktails that are shaken, not stirred. But for those who render computer-generated images, Monte Carlo is anything but glamorous. It refers to the noise that's a typical by-product of ray-traced images...like film grain artifacts, but on steroids. So it's not surprising that CG production studios have long sought de-noising solutions. But cost-prohibitive and labor-intensive strategies have

been around for decades. "But now that hardware is so powerful, we can do millions of calculations in parallel. That's why there's been an explosion of complicated machine learning algorithms for various applications."

Bako and his colleagues published their research in 2015, and Pixar took note. As Bako remarks, "Pixar had moved to a ray-traced-based rendering system, and they were paying attention to de-noising methods out of necessity." When Bako joined Pixar as a 2016 sum-

Disney Research Zurich were also testing de-noising on *Big Hero 6*.

As Pixar's Meyer explains, "Projects that use machine learning used to take months and months, but now we're training within a few days to a week." While this strategy has clear potential, DeRose cautions that it could take a year or two to be production-ready. "It's still speculative enough that a producer couldn't budget it for a particular film," he notes.

In the meantime, Pixar's collaboration with

Steve Bako and the team at Pixar worked together on new de-noising methods, which were used in this year highly anticipated feature *Coco*.



been impractical for feature film production thus far. As Mark Meyer of Pixar Research Group explains, "The computational requirements are so large for the complexity levels of our images. It's only recently that computers are finally catching up to the math that they're being asked to do."

This is where computer scientists from the University of California at Santa Barbara enter the scene. Steve Bako, a UCSB doctoral student, was collaborating with fellow researchers Nima Kalantari and Pradeep Sen on a machine learning approach to filter out Monte Carlo noise. They trained their lab's computer network to make "noisy" images look more like images that had been computed with greater numbers of light rays. While their process can be considered a subset of artificial intelligence, Bako notes that machine learning has

been impractical for feature film production thus far. As Mark Meyer of Pixar Research Group explains, "The computational requirements are so large for the complexity levels of our images. It's only recently that computers are finally catching up to the math that they're being asked to do."

mer intern, he quickly found himself in hyperdrive. He had "trained" UCSB's computers on about 20 garden-variety images—a typical academic assortment of lamps and desks. "On my first day at Pixar, they gave me *Finding Dory*," he recalls. "The images were diverse, and ideal for setting up a machine learning framework. Machine learning is good for a studio because they can train on one movie, and it's ready to go for another. They'll be able to take their *Do-*

*ry-trained network and throw more data at it for another movie."*

The viability of this approach soon became evident, notes Tony DeRose, who heads Pixar Research Group. "We experimented with noisy images from *Cars 3* to see what the algorithm would do. It did very well on that, and also with images from *Coco* and *Piper*." While this project proceeded at Pixar, researchers at

UCSB scientists continue. Back in his lab in Santa Barbara, Bako is able to access studio assets, and he's pushing forward using the Tungsten open source renderer. The results have been striking enough that Bako presented them at SIGGRAPH 2017. He couldn't release any information that's proprietary to Pixar, but Bako has posted enough open source information online so that others can test and build upon this research. As Meyer observes, "We've found that we reap benefits from letting other people continue to come up with ideas that move the whole field forward." It is proof, as Bako notes, "that academic institutions really can make a difference." ♦

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**Disney-Pixar's latest feature film *Coco* will be released in theaters on November 22.**

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RÉMI CHAYÉ

# The State of the Art

By Peter Busch



Peter Busch

**A**t the recent SIGGRAPH confab in Los Angeles, our company Faceware Technologies announced a SDK for our real-time facial mocap and animation technology, Faceware Live. With the rise in VR/AR/MR, interactive marketing and the use of CG, we have experienced a growing number of inquiries from different markets for real-time technologies. That's why we created this SDK to enable developers to create the tools they need to meet their own specific needs.

In the decade that I've been with Faceware (which used to be a service company known as Image Metrics), we have made great strides in offering more flexible and quality animation software and hardware to studios and indie artists alike. We are in a very niche business, within the motion-capture and facial capture field. So we decided to work on creating a stand-alone product line that people could use themselves without relying on third parties. Faceware has been immensely successful, and we now have customers in 56 countries

sored by Cheetos. When you walk into this restaurant they have this stand-alone screen with Chester the Cheetah there to greet you and welcome you to the restaurant. Behind the scenes was a motion-capture performer doing facial and body capture, which was streaming in real time through a game engine onto a display for the fans. People loved it and kids couldn't leave the screen, and Frito-Lay was very excited about it. It's that type of innovation that has started to push the envelope in terms of offering unique, interactive experiences for everyone.

We also just announced an exciting new feature in Cloud Imperium Games' *Star Citizen*. The feature allows a player to stream the motion of their face onto their game character as they talk to the other players in the game. In other words, player-to-player chat using real-time animation. We think this is really going to revolutionize how multiplayer gaming is done.

We are also working with two professional

processing power is going to help push that. Obviously the Intels and Nvidias and AMDs of the world are very interested in reasons to use their chips. When you have the hardware manufacturers, the content makers and screen providers pushing the medium, this will have benefits for everyone across the board.

## Adapt and Thrive

The key to success in this new world is being flexible. If you want to get into the tech and animation field, it's crucial to develop adaptable skills across all these different changing arenas. If you become somewhat of a turn-key artist—meaning you can create your artwork and animation, then integrate and technically support it—you will not be so specialized that you become an island. Eventually you will find your specialty and niche, but it never hurts to know all the complementary skills for what you really want to do.

The speed at which animated content is being created is getting faster and faster. You do

see indie movies (this even goes back to *Hoodwinked*) that are made for significantly less money, but have more returns. The faster you can create content, the better it is for creators to try new ideas. There's a wave of new content being created for a num-



**Brave New Worlds:** Left, a motion-capture performer greets customers as Chester at pop-up restaurant The Spotted Cheetah. Right, Faceware Live captures performances and produces facial animation in real time.



on six continents. From where we stand, it has been very fascinating to observe the many different ways animation is being created and used worldwide.

football teams, integrating the technology into their apps as well as creating interactive experiences in stadiums. You can have all these augmented reality effects applied to your face and screened up on the jumbotron.

I believe, in the next few years, we'll see more advancement in this area, much of it coming from all the big technology pushes that are going on around VR and AR. Take, for example, real-time rendering. Real-time rendering allows you to do a lot of different things in both mediums, and across other platforms. With devices like the iPhone 8, we are going to see a lot of utility-type tools as well as immersive tools. Pro-

ber of different areas. Just look at a trend like autonomous self-driving cars, and think what that means in terms of the amount of free time people will have to consume more content.

What is evident is that these are very interesting and fast-changing times, and it will be fascinating to follow the new wave of content creation in the near future. ♦

## New Ventures

We recently announced a new R&D division called Faceware Interactive, which focuses on real-time content creation. The use cases for this sort of technology point to a wide-open market. Everything from VR to theme parks to mall kiosks. Just this past month, we saw the launch of a pop-up restaurant in New York called The Spotted Cheetah, which was spon-

**Peter Busch is the VP of Business Development at Faceware Tech. For more info about the company's turnkey and real-time systems, visit [www.facewaretech.com](http://www.facewaretech.com).**

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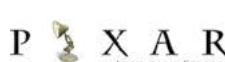
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# Tech Reviews

by Todd Sheridan Perry



## Wacom Cintiq Pro 13

It's no secret that I'm a fan of Wacom, and the Cintiq Pro 13 released earlier this year doesn't change my love. That's why this review is going to be a bit rosy.

Of course, I'll give you the raw facts, too: For anyone working in the digital realm, especially painting and sculpting, tablets are essential, and the Cintiq really is the staple. When you don't have the desk space or the budget for the full-sized tablet, the 16- and the 13-inch versions may be the way to go. You might be fine with a standard tablet using your monitor as your "paper," but there is a disconnect that happens separating the experience from the analog version of drawing and seeing the result under the tip of the pencil.

The Cintiq Pro 13 takes design hints from its big brother. The front surface is smooth and featureless with no buttons to catch on while you are drawing. The five LED-illuminated touch utility buttons are within the top of the bezel, granting easy access to key features while staying out of the way so you don't accidentally activate windows while you work.

It's incredibly thin, but it feels solid. Along the slender edge are three USB-C ports for display, audio and power, as well as a headphone jack and an SD card reader. A slot in the top edge fits a holder for your Wacom Pro Pen. The backside has a couple pop-out legs that provide a 20-degree working angle while on your desk.

The display is crisp, like a retina display, and I don't really think one needs more than the 1920 x



1080 resolution on the small screen. The color is accurate, but it "only" reaches 87 percent of Adobe RGB Spectrum, so don't attempt to do color-sensitive tasks like grading with Resolve or something. But you shouldn't be doing that on a 13" monitor anyway.

If I had a gripe, it would be that the tablet technology is outrunning my workstation. I don't have USB-C ports, but Wacom does provide a converter from USB-C to Mini DisplayPort, but I don't have Mini DisplayPorts. However, you can use a standard DP to MiniDP converter. Fortunately, I was reviewing the latest HP ZBooks that do have USB-C. Another minor gripe would be that you don't have the extra control buttons normally found on the Intuos—and I use these ExpressKeys *all the time*. The larger Cintiq Pro has a bluetooth handheld controller, which isn't bundled with the 13. And you can order the ExpressKey Remote for an additional cost. Did I mention that I love these tablets?

**Website:** [www.wacom.com](http://www.wacom.com)

**Price:** \$999.95

## NVIDIA Quadro P4000

NVIDIA released a new batch of Quadro cards last fall (yes, I'm late in the game), resting on the Pascal GPU architecture. The series ranges from the low-end entry level P400 to the screaming behemoth GP100. I was able to test drive the P4000, which sits on the high end of the mid-level cards.

The first thing I noticed is how incredibly small the card is, given its power—especially in comparison to the 5200 I pulled out of my workstation. It has a comparably short PCB and a broad cooling system. But the card is powerful despite the size, so it still draws 105W, requiring the PCI Express power connector to feed the 1792



CUDA Cores and 5.3 TFLOPS of single-precision computing.

The P4000 comes in 5GB and 8GB RAM flavors. Mine is the 8GB kind, which is great—make that essential—for GPU RAM-hungry software like Foundry's Mari and Allegorithmic's Substance Painter, and additionally compositing software like Nuke and After Effects are throwing more and more processes to the GPU. The more RAM, the better. I would consider 8GB the floor rather than the ceiling if you are doing this kind of work.

There are four 1.4 certified DisplayPorts on the back that can drive 4K displays at 120Hz, 5K displays at 60Hz, and 8K (?) at 60Hz. The simultaneous multi-stream displays are great for multi-monitor use, but with VR needs growing exponentially, we need that throughput. The top of the card sports SLI connectors for tying multiple cards together for even more GPU power, stereo ports for 3D displays, and Quadro Sync ports for syncing multiple monitors to display one huge image at ultra-high resolutions on arrays of monitors—not that you'll have something like that in your office.

The only thing missing is USB-C ports for your Wacom tablet!

All in all, this release is a super strong mid-level card for most of your GPU needs, without a huge price tag that comes with the higher-end cards. I see this as the entry level card you should go for if you are getting into higher-level modeling and texture painting. As I said before, those kinds of programs are extremely hungry for RAM, and the last thing you want is lag when you are trying to paint.

**Website:** [www.nvidia.com](http://www.nvidia.com)

**Price:** \$215~ (retail); \$880 (MSRP)

## Radeon Pro WX 3100

Earlier this summer, Radeon released the WX 2100 and WX 3100: two new entry-level graphics cards for your GPU needs. I'm looking at the WX

3100 with 4GB of RAM, and a peak 1.25 TFLOP single-precision compute.

The WX 3100 is even smaller than the NVIDIA P4000 I was reviewing. In fact, it's so small that I am beginning to wonder how we can fit all this technology into such a tiny package. Probably, the 14nm Polaris GPU architecture has something to do with that. It boasts eight 512 streams, processors, and specs have it performing 2.3 times better than its predecessors. The benchmarks against its closest NVIDIA competitor, the P600, have it at 28 percent faster. I'll take their word for it, but I didn't have a P600 to compare myself, and putting the WX 3100 against the P4000 is hardly a fair assessment.

But back to real numbers: The WX 3100 is extremely conservative with its power draw of 50W, along with a power management system to balance out the power load and reduce consumption when it's idle. Also, the backside has one full and two mini 1.4 DisplayPorts (so I can directly plug in my Wacom Cintiq Pro, yay!), which can drive three 4K monitors at 60Hz—or one 5K at 30Hz.

The performance is snappy and responsive. The card is certified for SOLIDWORKS, PTC Creo, Siemens NX and CATIA, but I

don't have those to test with, so instead I went with Maya, 3ds Max, Modo, ZBrush, Mari and Substance Painter. Modeling programs stayed quick, especially with your straight-forward modeling tasks. ZBrush can get out of hand quickly, but even at millions and millions of polys, I was still getting things done. Mari and Substance bogged down much more quickly because of their dependence on GPU power and the RAM capacity. But even so, the card took a lot of abuse before slowing.

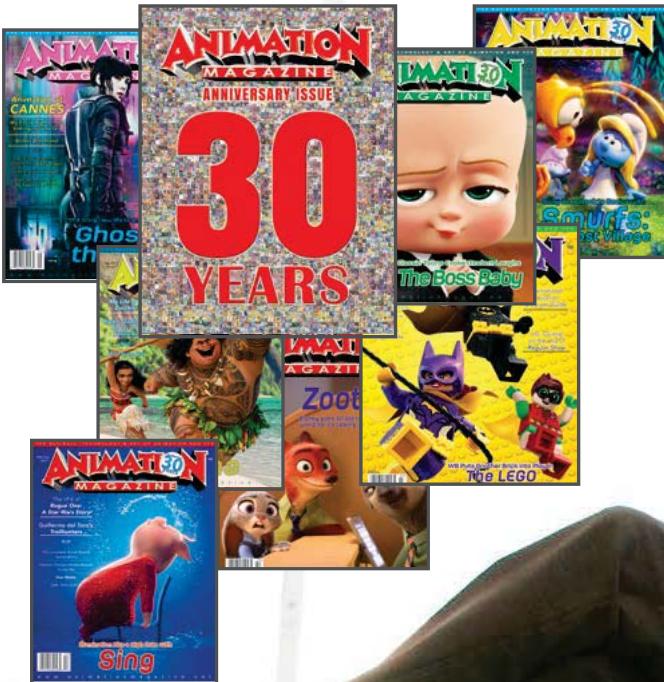
The biggest thing the WX 3100 has going for it is the price-performance ratio. At \$199, the card has a ton of power and is more readily accessible than higher-end cards—especially for artists just getting in the game. I wish it were possible to increase the RAM, but to stay inexpensive, small and energy efficient, I think the WX 3100 may be capped. Overall, it's a great entry-level card.

**Website:** [pro.radeon.com](http://pro.radeon.com)

**Price:** \$199



**Todd Sheridan Perry** is a vfx supervisor and digital artist whose credits include *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, *Speed Racer*, 2012, *Final Destination 5* and *Avengers: Age of Ultron*. You can reach him at [todd@teaspoonvfx.com](mailto:todd@teaspoonvfx.com).



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# Seibert Reaches Out to Northern Stars

**Frederator and WOW! expand plans for Canadian Content**



Fred Seibert, who is best known as the producer of hit shows such as *The Fairly OddParents*, *Adventure Time* and *Bravest Warriors* and the founder and CEO of the popular Frederator Network, is on the lookout for fresh Canadian talent. The toon titan, who is also the CCO of Canadian-American studio WOW! Unlimited Media, plans to feature more Canadian-grown content to the Frederator Network as its YouTube channel is now one of six online destinations sanctioned by the Canadian Audio-Visual Certification Office.

"WOW Unlimited has been working with a wide range of top talent in Canada for 20 years," says Seibert. "Frederator Networks is thrilled to have one of our channels be approved by CAVCO to be able to help even more get their original voices out to the world."

"What's exciting about this is that Canada has worked incredibly hard to build its animation, but a shop like Frederator has always been kept at a distance because we're not Canadian, so we couldn't take advantage of the country's talent community as well as we'd like to," Seibert adds. "When we started the YouTube network, we were excited about the idea of expanding the talent pool beyond New York and Los Angeles. Also, the Canadian tax system has been offering support to the animation business for decades, but the legal systems have had a hard time keeping up with the fast changes in technology. As a result, people who worked exclusively in the digital space were left out in the cold. However, the system has now evolved, and we can now take advantage of the new rules to work on more projects with our new partners in Canada."

"Adding WOW's Channel Frederator as an online content destination supports creators of original Canadian programs, by providing those programs with direct access to a broader Canadian and global audience, and Canadian producers access to Canadian tax credits that support those programs," notes Michael



Hirsh, CEO of WOW! Unlimited Media.

## An Ever-Expanding Empire

Frederator channels feature hit series including Pendleton Ward's *Bravest Warriors* and Natasha Allegri's *Bee and PuppyCat*, and a rich universe of new shorts from rising animators. The Frederator Network is the world's largest animation-only multi-channel network on YouTube and programs online channels such as Channel Frederator and Cartoon Hangover. Between January and April 2017, the network added 270 channels and received over 2.4 billion views. As of April 30, it had 43 million subscribers.

Seibert points out that YouTube has always been a powerful tool to approach new talent. "With the new CAVCO situation, we can help talent really expand their vision," he says. "At WOW, we try to help talent beyond the areas that they're currently producing their content. If they want to expand on TV or movies, co-produce shows with Frederator, this is our way of making that happen. In this case, we can help Canadian-based channels or talent find a bigger audience via the Frederator Network."

As always, Seibert is also busy overseeing the many successful animated shows he produces. His latest project *Castlevania* (based on the popular game *Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse*) had a successful launch on Netflix in July. "The series has had incredible success across the world," he notes. "We acquired the rights to the property more than a decade ago, and we brought producer Kevin Kolde to Frederator. Piece by piece with patience and per-

sistence, we put this show together, and it's been great to see it receive so much attention."

Among the other news, the Frederator maestro shares with us that thanks to a partnership with Nelvana, the fourth season of *Bravest Warriors* will be ready to air in the U.S. towards the end of this year. The second season of *Bee and PuppyCat* is also in production, and the ninth and final season of *Adventure Time* will conclude on Nickelodeon in spring of 2018. Seibert is also overseeing his animated incubator project, a joint venture with Sony Pictures Animation which will deliver 12 shorts to air on Cartoon Hangover. And, he plans to announce several new miniseries produced by the Frederator Digital Unit in New York City in the next few weeks.

As expected, Seibert is juggling hundreds of other projects as he heads over to the MIP Junior market in France to deliver his keynote. No matter how busy he is, he continues to be a remarkable source of inspiration for artists and animators all over the world. "I think that animation continues to be experiencing yet another Golden Age," he concludes. "We are in a place where *Castlevania* can exist at the same time as *Adventure Time*, and *Bravest Warriors* can entertain fans in parallel to *The Loud House* and *The Fairly OddParents*. We are seeing high-quality animation being produced for every age now in such incredible numbers. We could have never imagined this second Golden Age only a few decades ago." ♦

**For more info, visit [www.channelfrederatornetwork.com](http://www.channelfrederatornetwork.com) and [frederator.com](http://frederator.com).**



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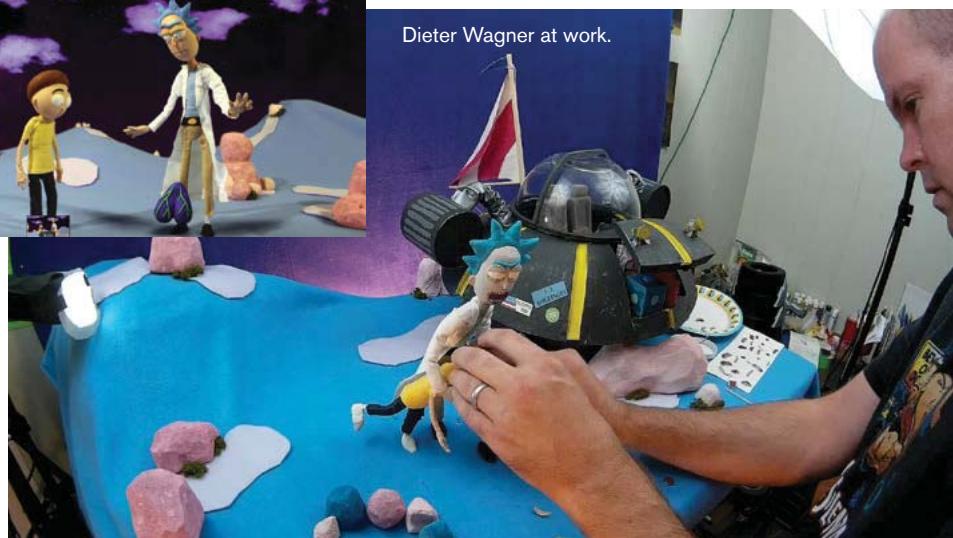
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# In Praise of Passion and Perseverance

This month, we caught up with **Dieter Wagner**, a self-taught independent animator who used his passion and perseverance to romance the folks at *Robot Chicken* and *Rick and Morty*, and land a dream job at Snap, Inc. Here are a few of the things we learned from him:



Dieter Wagner at work.



## So, Dieter, tell me about your journey so far.

Well, it took me about 20 years, more than 10 trips going back and forth between North Carolina and Los Angeles, dozens of small animation projects, and a bunch of stubbornness to ultimately become a 3D designer for Snap.

## How did it all start?

As long as I can remember I always wanted to make cartoons, but where I grew up in North Carolina there was no animation industry and certainly no training. I had always planned on carrying on the family business of textiles, but in the late '90s I stumbled upon the Martin Hash Animation:Master website and that really opened my eyes to a whole new way of making animation. This helped keep me motivated for the next few years to study and develop my own projects. I eventually enrolled in the very first Animation Mentor course in 2005, sent my demo reel to everyone I could find, and eight months after graduation I landed my first gig as a remote animator for *Andy's Airplanes*.

## How did you go from a remote animator for a kid's show to working on *Rick and Morty*?

I always had a huge passion for stop-motion and wanted to explore this further, so I enrolled in Animation A Team, which was the only online stop-motion course available at the time. In this course, my instructor mentored me through a *Robot Chicken*-style shot. Once completed, I posted it on Twitter and people from the show actually contacted me. They said they loved my work and their animation director would be calling me soon.

Although it didn't lead to a job, the response I received from this was greater than anything I had ever done with CG, so I felt it was my true calling. Sometime later, I took a similar approach with a Kevin Smith short called *Tusky Business*, and that eventually led to spending

three to four months producing my next short, *The Misadventures of Rick and Morty*. The creator of *Rick and Morty* loved the short and ended up hiring me for my first official stop-motion job where I produced two promos for the third season of the show.

## You've been on a long journey, how did you persevere?

Passion. If you are not passionate about what you want, you're going to turn and run at the first sign of resistance. I was convinced I wanted to be an animator and I was determined it was going to work out.

When times got tough, people would tell me about other job opportunities, but it just didn't register with me as even an option. I told myself, although the contracts seem to be few and far between, it's still animation. If you quit when the going gets tough, that just shows you weren't really passionate about it in the first place. Many times I resorted to side jobs to pay the bills but still kept focused on animating. If there's something that you really want to do, you can't stop pursuing it.

## How important are referrals in this industry?

Referrals and recommendations are how I made it happen from job to job. Even if you do remote work, be friendly. Chit-chat with people. You never stop building relationships and friends. If you're genuine and have no agenda and show that you love what you do, people will be receptive and want to help. It will come

back around and help you get jobs.

## What advice would you give to those just starting out in animation?

Familiarize yourself with all the moving parts of the animation industry. Try to follow people on social media that are doing animation professionally. Study what they do and look for an opportunity to network with them. Some are nice enough that they may even give you advice. Whatever it is you want to do, be doing it. You must have something to show to get interest. For example, I loved stop-motion, so I started doing it even though I wasn't getting paid and had no idea how or if I ever would.

## Any closing comments?

Even though I have a dream job at a dream studio, I still feel like I'm on a journey, and I don't truly know what the next step will be. I feel very lucky and honored to be in this position. I'm able to do what I love, support and spend time with my family and I realize how truly special that is. I don't know if this is the last step in my journey, but if there is a next step, it will definitely be in animation. ♦

**Martin Grebing**  
is president of  
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# An Explosion of Creativity



**The past decade saw more choices in animated content all over the world as audiences enjoyed 2D, CG, stop-motion and multimedia projects both on the big screen and the small.**

With each eclectic issue, *Animation Magazine* has been chronicling the fast growth and dynamic expansion of the animation and visual effects world over the past 10 years. In 2008, we reported on the arrival of two excellent independent animated features from New York-based filmmakers Bill Plympton and Nina Paley: *Idiots and Angels* and *Sita Sings the Blues*, which set new standards for 2D-animated projects. The first part of the year saw the release of Blue Sky's great-looking adaptation of *Dr. Seuss' Horton Hears a Who!* and the Wachowskis' big-screen version of *Speed Racer*, but it was Andrew Stanton's genre-bending *WALL•E* that really defined the year in terms of both CG animation and the depth of story and character development. Among the other popular movies that graced our covers that year were DreamWorks' instant classic *Kung Fu Panda* and the crowd-pleasing *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa*. Disney's underrated canine-star pic *Bolt* also was a popular cover feature.

On the TV front, Disney Channel's long-running animated 2D hit *Phineas and Ferb*, created by Dan Povenmire and Jeff "Swampy" Marsh, and Dave Filoni's CG-animated *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* were two of the year's heavy-hitters. Other highlights included Cartoon Network's *Ben 10: Alien Force*, Henson's *Sid the Science Kid*, *Batman: The Brave and the Bold* and the first of Disney's popular *Tinker Bell* home entertainment features. Meanwhile, visual effects aficionados feasted their eyes on the wonders of *The Dark Knight*, *Iron Man* and *The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian*.

In 2009, Pixar hit the critical and box-office jackpot again with directors Pete Docter and Bob Peterson's poignant adventure *Up*, which went on to gross over \$734 million worldwide. *Animag* detailed the making of this feature, as well as LAIKA's acclaimed *Coraline*, DreamWorks' *Monsters vs. Aliens*, Blue Sky's *Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs*, Sony's *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* and Disney's delightful 2D-animated outing, *The Princess and the Frog*. We also delivered detailed behind-the-scenes effects stories about live-action blockbusters such as *Avatar*, *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, *Star Trek*, and *Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian*. The small screen was also heavily represented by shows such as Mike Judge's *The Goode Family*, Craig Bartlett's *Dinosaur Train*, Nick's *Fanboy & Chum Chum* and Disney's Christmas special, *Prep & Landing*.

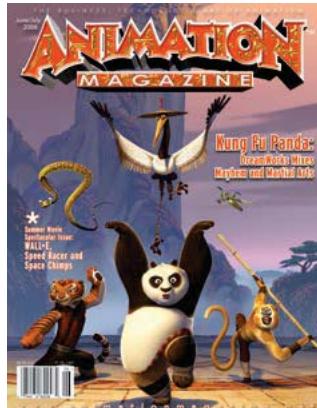
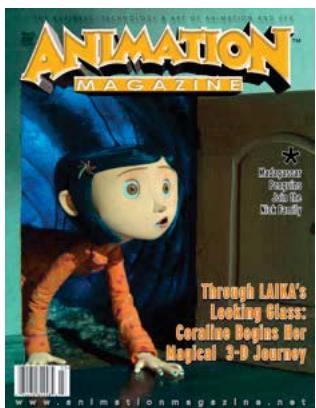
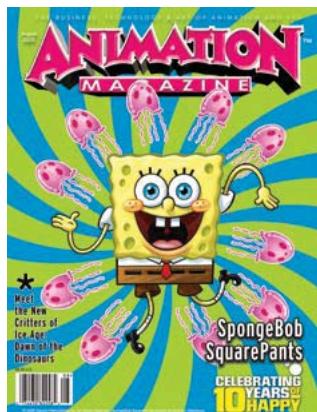
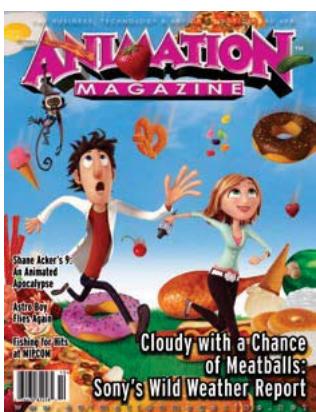
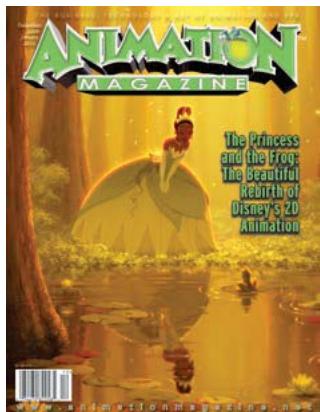
The following year, our readers learned all about the making of Pixar's much-anticipated *Toy Story 3* and DreamWorks' delightful *How to Train Your Dragon*. Among the other top animated features that landed the cover in 2010 were Illumination's *Despicable Me*, DreamWorks' *Shrek Forever After* and Nathan Greno and Byron Howard's colorful and very modern take on an old tale for Disney, *Tangled*. Live-action/

CG mix movies that also got a lot of attention this year were *Alice in Wonderland*, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Part 1*, *Inception* and *TRON: Legacy*. The first half of the year saw the debut of FX's beloved *Archer*, *Ugly Americans*, *The Drawn Together Movie* and *Ben 10: Ultimate Alien* on the small screen, and our fall TV coverage included the premieres of *Fish Hooks*, *MAD*, *Regular Show*, *Pound Puppies* and *T.U.F.F Puppy*.

Sequels were enjoying their moment in the sun in 2011. Pixars' *Cars 2*, DreamWorks' *Kung Fu Panda 2* and Warner Bros' *Happy Feet 2* were three of the biggest CG-animated movies of the year. *Animag* also offered full coverage of the making of Disney's *Winnie the Pooh*, Paramount's well-received CG epic *Rango*, DreamWorks' *Shrek* spin-off *Puss in Boots* and Blue Sky's *Rio*. While these animated pics had families lining up at the box-office, live-action features such as *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Part 2*, *Transformers: Dark of the Moon*, *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides*, *Thor* and *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* also had audiences enthralled with their amazing visual panache and vfx magic. Sony's summer treat *Smurfs* and Paramount's holiday release *The Adventures of Tintin* delivered charming adaptations of the popular European comic-book characters. On the TV side, we brought readers up to date with the arrival of new shows such as *Bob's Burgers*, *Wild Kratts*, *Young Justice*, *Jake and the Never Land Pirates*, *The Looney Tunes Show* and *ThunderCats*.

LAIKA's *ParaNorman*, Sony Animation's *Hotel Transylvania* and Pixar's *Brave* were three of our most popular cover features in 2012. The year also brought us great articles about movies such as Blue Sky's *The Lorax*, DreamWorks' *Madagascar 3: Europe's Most Wanted* and Tim Burton's *Frankenweenie*. We also saw the debut of TV fare such as Nickelodeon's much-lauded *The Legend of Korra* and Disney Channel's quirky and awesome *Gravity Falls* throughout the year. The holiday season brought us two wonderful features, Disney's *Wreck-It-Ralph* and DreamWorks' underperforming *Rise of the Guardians*, both of which landed on the cover of the magazine. We also offered extensive coverage of the visual effects achievements of the year as seen in features such as Marvel's *The Avengers*, *The Dark Knight Rises* and *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*.

We delved into the much-anticipated worlds of Disney's *Frozen*, Pixar's *Monsters University*, DreamWorks' *The Croods* and Sony Animation's *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs 2* in 2013. The visual effects frontrunners of the year—*Iron Man 3*, *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*, *Man of Steel*, *Gravity*, *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug* and *Star Trek Into Darkness*—all warranted in-depth articles as did the notable animated TV splashes, which included *Sofia the First*, *Teen Titans Go!*, *Beware the Batman*, *Wander Over Yonder* and the brilliant and



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from Izabela Amroziak's portfolio (as co-author),  
props for "Small Hands in a Big War" series  
dir. Matthias Zirzow, prod. Looks Film&TV GmbH

hugely popular *Rick and Morty*.

The following year, we chronicled another fantastic batch of animated cinematic achievements. With the likes of *The LEGO Movie*, *Big Hero 6*, *How to Train Your Dragon 2* and *Mr. Peabody and Sherman* in the limelight, our writers landed informative and inspiring interviews with the directors and the artistic teams responsible for their success. Also on our radar this year were vfx-heavy blockbusters such as *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug*, *Maleficent*, *X-Men: Days of Future Past* and *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes*. Of course, we also covered the year's best animated festival shorts, web series and TV debuts such as *Sonic Boom*, *BoJack Horseman*, *Breadwinners*, *Clarence*, *The 7D*, *All Hail King Julien*, *Mike Tyson Mysteries*, *Star Wars Rebels* and *Tumble Leaf*.

In 2015, live-action fantasy and sci-fi epics such as *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, *Jurassic World*, *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, *The Martian* and *Ant-Man* kept our visual effects reporters busy. However, envelope-pushing CG-animated features such as Pixar's *Inside Out*, Illumination's *Minions*, DreamWorks' *Home* and Sony's *Hotel Transylvania 2* also attracted record audiences to theaters. The year's auspicious TV debuts included ZAG's *Miraculous*, *Puffin Rock*, *The Adventures of Puss in Boots*, *Dinotrux*, *Dawn of the Croods*, *Harvey Beaks*, *Miles from Tomorrowland*, *The Lion Guard*, *Star vs. The Forces of*

*Evil*, *SuperMansion*, *Pig Goat Banana Cricket* and *Pickle and Peanut*. In addition to covering all these toons, *Animag* also profiled indie animators and festival favorites that helped push the artistic integrity of the medium.

Animation fans enjoyed another busy year in 2016, packed with colorful new properties debuting on multiple platforms. The arrival of *The Loud House* on Nickelodeon, *Milo Murphy's Law* on Disney XD, *Justice League Action* on Cartoon Network and *Trollhunters* on Netflix all warranted in-depth articles in the pages of our magazine. Our writers also covered the year's biggest animated features, a long list that included LAIKA's *Kubo and the Two Strings*, Pixar's *Finding Dory*, Illumination's *The Secret Life of Pets*, Disney's *Zootopia* and *Moana*, and DreamWorks' *Trolls* and *Kung Fu Panda 3*. We also brought attention to the fantastic visual effects work featured in blockbusters such as *The Jungle Book*, *Doctor Strange*, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* and *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*.

You can find out more about our 30-year history and all the many animated movies, TV shows, multimedia, shorts and vfx articles at [www.animationmagazine.net](http://www.animationmagazine.net). You can also share your own favorite stories and suggest future articles at [edit@animationmagazine.net](mailto:edit@animationmagazine.net). Thank you for all your support and being part of the *Animation Magazine* community for the past three decades. ♦

Learn about the contribution of Polish artists and service providing companies working in animation industry to international film production



from Marcin Jasinski's portfolio, puppet for "The Metamorphosis" trailer,  
dir. Marek Skrobek, prod. OPUS Film

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These are the some of the amazing people who were part of our event in previous years!

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# Discs to Delight Your Inner Child

**Captain Underpants, Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2 and Ushio and Tora offer shiny new takes on favorite stories, while The Lion King gets polished for the Signature Collection.**

By Mercedes Milligan

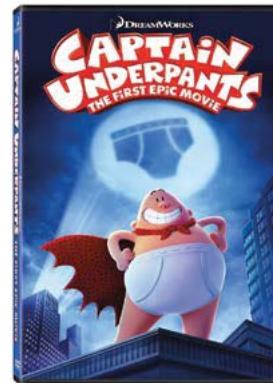
## Captain Underpants: The First Epic Movie

[Fox, \$29.98]

DreamWorks Animation's adaptation of the hilarious illustrated kids' books by Dav Pilkey is soaring home this month, having made a heroic box office showing (despite opening against *Wonder Woman*) and winning over critics with its faithful humor and bouncy animation.

Directed by David Soren (*Turbo*), the CG family comedy follows best friends and persistent pranksters George (voiced by Kevin Hart) and Harold (Thomas Middleditch), whose jokes get a little too real when they hypnotize their crotchety principal (Ed Helms) into thinking he's Captain Underpants—a comic-book hero of their own creation. The voice cast also features Nick Kroll as Professor Poopypants.

Available on DVD, Blu-ray (\$36.99), 4K (\$44.99) and Digital HD, special features include a two-part Q&A with the stars, de-



leted scenes, two galleries (Comic Book Covers, The Art of DreamWorks *Captain Underpants*), two lyric videos ("Captain Underpants Theme" by Weird Al Yankovic, "A Friend Like You" by Andy Grammer) and six features: *The Really Cool Adventures of Captain Underpants* motion comic, *The Captain Underpants Guide to Being a Hero*, *The Professor Poopypants (Totally Original and Super Cool) Guide to Being a Villain*, *Kevin Hart and Ed Helms Surprise Fans*, *Lunch Lady PSA with Kristen Schaal*, and *Sock Puppets Real Stars*.

Grab your cape, pull up your tightest whities, and prepare to be entertained!

[Release date: Sept. 12]

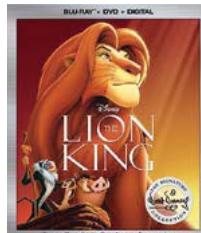
## The Lion King Walt Disney Signature Collection [Disney, BD \$24.99]

With buzz building around Jon Favreau's "live-action" remake for 2019, the Mouse House revealed at D23 Expo that this 1994 animated classic would be the next title in the Signature Collection.

Directed by Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff, the stirring adventure of Simba the lion cub is the second highest-grossing film of all time, earned two Oscars (Best Original Score and Song) plus the Golden Globe for Musical or Comedy. The voice cast features Matthew Broderick (Simba), Nathan Lane (Timon), Ernie Sabella (Pumbaa), Jeremy Irons (Scar), James Earl Jones (Mufasa), Moira Kelly (Nala), Robert Guillaume (Rafiki) and Rowan Atkinson (Zazu).

Also available on DVD, the Blu-ray combo pack includes a pride of bonus content, including limited edition film frames, sing-along version, deleted & alternate scenes, bloopers & outtakes, classic bonus preview reel, *The Recording Sessions*, *Visualizing A Villain*, *Inside the Story Room*, and *Nathan and Matthew: The Extended Lion King Conversation*. The digital version also includes *Musical Journey*. If you want to make a roarin' day of it, Disney is also releasing Special Edition BD sets of *The Lion King 1 ½* and *The Lion King 2: Simba's Pride*.

[Release date: Aug. 29]



## Guardians of the Galaxy, Vol. 2 [Disney, BD \$24.99]

Audiences and critics were delighted with this invigorating return to the colorful, crazy Marvel sci-fi universe, and now you can take all the laser-blasting, space monster-infested action home on a variety of formats—including 4K Ultra, in a Marvel Studios first.

Directed again by James Gunn and set to an all-new soundscape, the sequel sets Guardians Gamora (Zoe Saldana), Drax (Dave Bautista), Groot (Vin Diesel) and Rocket (Bradley Cooper) on a quest to unravel their leader Peter Quill/Star Lord's (Chris Pratt) true parentage, forming new alliances with old enemies and fan-favorite comic characters.

Blu-ray and 4K (\$24.99) sets grow the story universe with intro and audio commentary by Gunn, four deleted scenes, gag reel, the viral "Guardians Inferno" music video starring David Hasselhoff, and "Making of" featurette. The Digital version boasts exclusive breakdowns of the "Elector Escape," "Gamora and Nebula" and "Rocket and Ravagers" scenes, plus sneak-peek at the new Disneyland ride *Guardians of the Galaxy - Mission: Breakout!* The interplanetary Pratt-falls are also available on no-frills DVD (\$19.99).

[Release date: Aug. 22]



## Ushio & Tora Premium Box Set [Sentai Filmworks, BD \$249.98]

The ultimate paranormal odd-couple anime gets the deluxe treatment with this 13-disc complete series Blu-ray/DVD set. In addition to all 39 episodes, this collectible set also includes a poster, illustrated information booklet, four art cards, a chibi-Tora keychain and your very own mini Beast Spear.

Based on the '90s manga from Kazuhiro Fuita and produced by MAPPA and Studio VOLN, the bizarre adventure begins when a sceptical young man named Ushio discovers a real-life demon pinned to the wall of a locked basement by an enchanted spear. At first content to ignore the little problem, Ushio finds himself forced to free Tora when his presence attracts other demons, binding the reluctant human to the Beast Spear as well.



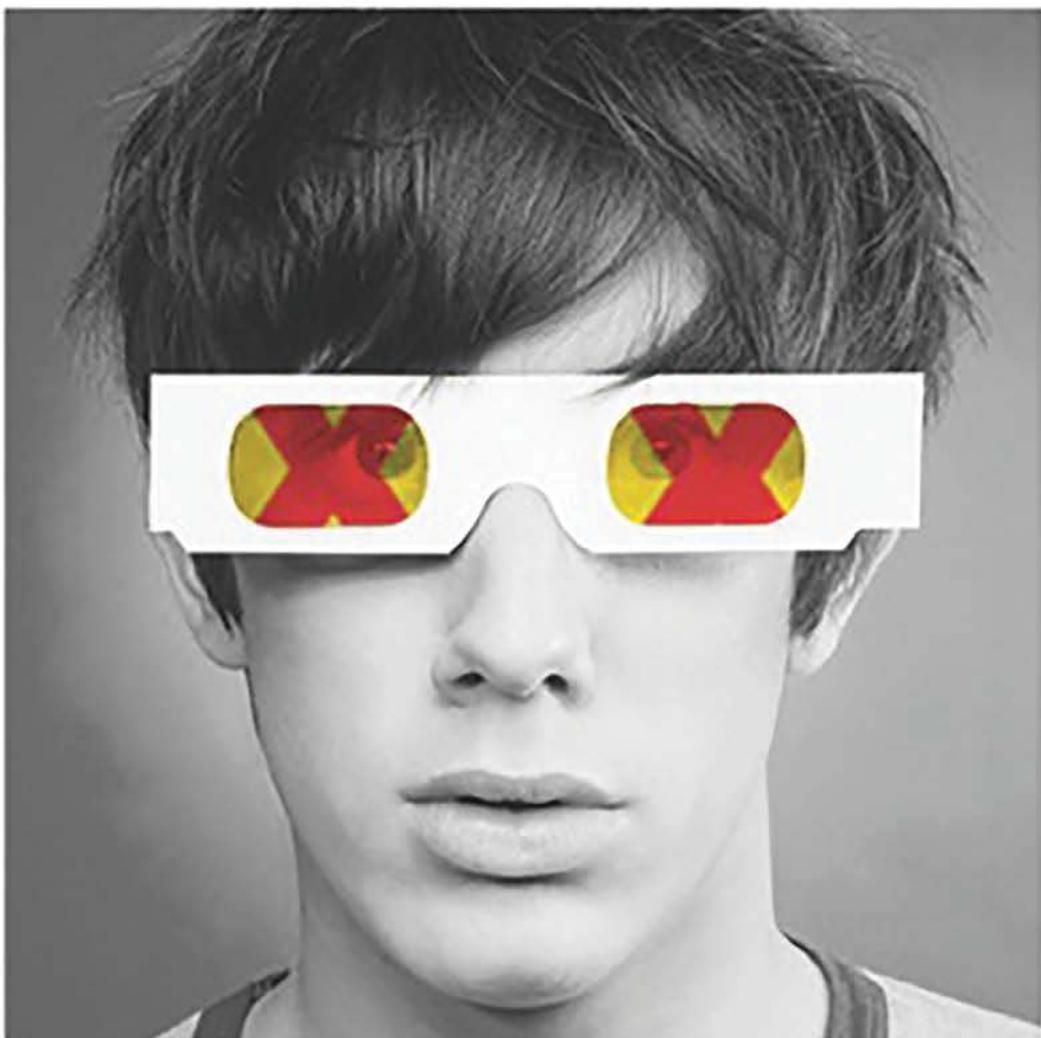
But, you probably knew that if you were willing to fork over a couple hundred bucks!

(FYI, most e-tailers including sentaifilmworks.com have it marked down closer to \$160.)

[Release date: Sept. 26] ♦

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# Ten Questions For Niki Lindroth von Bahr

**I**t's been a great year for Swedish artist Niki Lindroth. Her brilliant musical short **The Burden**, which featured singing and dancing animals fighting existential despair in a market place, won the prestigious Cristal for Best Short Film at Annecy in June. She made time for us during her summer holiday to answer some questions.

**Can you tell us a bit about the origins of your award-winning short *The Burden*?**  
I'd say there were some different ideas coming together. I have always loved old Hollywood musicals, like *Singin' in the Rain* and *Anchors Aweigh*, and I wanted to do some kind of animated homage to this genre. But then I also wanted to work with a darker, contemporary theme. If you were a low-paid employee working endless hours in a generic shopping area, what would you sing about?

**Where do you usually find your inspirations?**

Hollywood musicals, *Tales of Beatrix Potter* and the films of Michael Haneke—always.

**What do you love about working in this particular medium (stop-motion/puppetry)?**

I love to make sets and puppets by hand. And stop-motion animation is the perfect way for

me to combine that interest with my fascination by the film medium.

**How much did your short cost to make and how long did it take you to create it?**

We had quite a small budget, sadly, about 75,000 euros (about \$85,000), and worked on the short for almost two and a half years. It's been difficult, to say the least!

**What would you say your biggest challenge was in making your short?**

There have been many, many challenges, but definitely the low budget. Also, some of the sets were really hard to make. Like the supermarket, with hundreds of tiny food boxes made by hand. And the market place exterior set that measured 2.5 meters (8.2 feet) in diameter. That model alone took me over three months to finish.

**Have you been surprised by the acclaim and attention your short has received?**

Yes. I was very unsure if the Swedish voices would work abroad at all, since there is so much speaking and singing compared to my previous films. Also, despite our tight production budget, I'm so happy that my film has been screened amongst animated films with much bigger budgets and high production value.

**What are you working on next?**

Right now, I make sculptures for a couple of art exhibitions, which I do alongside my film projects. I'm also planning to make some kind of animated horror movie, which may take place in the financial world.

**What are your favorite shows on TV or movies you have seen this year?**

I love the documentary show *O.J. Simpson: Made in America*. The institutional racism and political movements that went on simultaneously with that case is just so interesting and important to learn about.

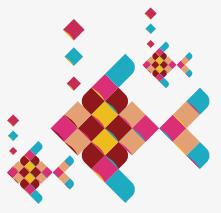
**Who are your animation heroes?**

I love the work of Réka Bucsi, Don Hetzfeldt and Daisy Jacobs.

**What is the best advice you can give to those who want to make it in animation?**

Be really stubborn, I mean *really* stubborn. It's also a good thing if you're an incurable time optimist. That means not being fully aware of how time-consuming everything in animation actually is, and manage to repress that experience when starting your next project!!!♦

**To find out more, visit [www.nikilindroth.com](http://www.nikilindroth.com).**



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